ENTERTAINMENT

Robbie Williams is Guinness World Records holder

BUSINESS / B1

Banks' bad loans amount to P170.6B

NEWS / A5

Filipinos in denial over bird flu, says health official

WORLD / A8

White House leaning toward Iraq pullout

Garcillano spent his time reading, writing memoirs

By Michael Lim Ubac

ALL THE WHILE THAT THE STORM WAS wondering where he had gone, Virgilio Garcillano was, by his account, somewhere in the South, writing his memoirs and reading a book.

The book which the widely maligned for-

CONTINUED A8 / C1

PHILIPPINE DAILY
INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS VIEWS

Singapore hangman axed after his identity blown

SINGAPORE—SINGAPORE has sacked its long-serving hangman two days after it emerged that the executioner of an Australian drug-smuggler, after his identity and picture was exposed by media.

"They called me a few days

CONTINUED A12

e-mail feedback@inquirer.com.ph Monday, November 28, 2005 A 36 pages vol. 39 / no. 331 website: www.inq7.net

I never left RP, says Garci

Denies talk with GMA to rig 2004 poll results

By Michael Lim Ubac

THE MAN WHOSE ALLEGED phone conversations with President Macapagal-Arroyo almost brought down her administration and whose disappearance sparked what was said to be a global manhunt never left the country after all—at least, that is what he now says.

In an exclusive interview with this reporter, who was blindfolded before he was brought to the clandestine meeting near Cauayan City, former Election Commissioner Virgilio Garcillano said his widely reported "jaunt to—rape" was a "hoax."

"I was here all this time," Garcillano said in the first interview he gave a newspaper since his wife Grace last week broke the news of her husband's presence in the south.

"It's safer here than abroad," he quipped, contradicting an official diplomatic report issued by Singaporean authorities that he had flown to that city-state on July 14 en route to a third country in Europe.

The man at the center of the 2004 ballot-rigging scandal made the startling revelation during an interview at high noon inside a heavily tinted van inconspicuously parked at the foot of a mountain facing the sea.

A few minutes hushed in the air at a nearby lunch as he talked, denying he had ever spoken to Mr Arroyo to rig the results of last year's presidential election.

He said the opposition should not give him too much credit for Mr Arroyo's victory because "I'm not Superman. I can't (perform) magic."

Garcillano also questioned the authenticity of the so-called "Hello Garci" tape or tapes containing recordings of his alleged conversations with the President. But he promised to release more to public view.

Asked if his testimony would be damaging to President Arroyo or some opposition leaders, he said: "To be it. I'm not protecting her. I'm just telling you my side because that is the truth."

Ballistic as a missile during cross-ping turmoil: Let the ships fall where they may), he added.

Opposition senators scoffed at Garcillano's

CONTINUED A11, C3

RP opens quest for SEAG crown with 5 golds

THE 23rd Southeast Asian Games formally open with a colorful fireworks display at the Quirino Grandstand in Manila.

By Ray Luarca

A POWERFUL LIARA WASTEBUSTLOME, COMrolled strokes and graceful steps.

These were the key elements that propelled long jumper Marestella Torres, divers Hiedie Mae Perez and Cesar Dominico, rowe sister Rosiele Abaico and parasailer dancers Michael Mendoza-Rosindo Adona and Rhe Rosiena Filoteena Sal- trailer to gold medals in the 23rd Southeast Asian Games yesterday.

Games start today: SPORTS, Page A23

The five-gold haul, coupled with five silvers and four bronzes, catapulted the Filipinos to the early lead in the 11-nation biennial meet that was formally declared open by President Macapagal-Arroyo at the Rizal Park (More SEAG stories in Sports, Pages A23-29.)

Malaysia followed with five golds, highlighted by pole vaulter Soudimola Sumer's record-smashing effort of 4.40m, two silvers and three bronzes. Laotian bride Thongsavanh

CONTINUED A23

DIVILLA Mae Perez and Sicat Dominico perform [illegible] **bagging the gold medal in the women's 3-meter springboard synchronized diving at the Rizal Memorial Center in Los Baños, Laguna.**

MARESTELLA Torres lands on a golden finish in the women's long jump event.

Children enjoy veggie servings from giant salad

By Vincent Cabreza
PDI Watcher & Lunch Buffoon

MAGNO CITY—THOUSANDS OF CHILDREN enjoyed their greens at the fifth Angus Steak Salad Festival yesterday, a development that its [illegible] are proud of.

"Here we see by the number of children here that salad really makes a difference," said Gerry Beltran, vice president of the Angusto Association of Metals and Iron (Beltran).

The enthusiasm that the festival was helping create amusements of proper nutrition, he said.

In previous festivals, children accounted for about 40 percent of the people who consumed the salad, according to the festival official.

But yesterday children dominated the queue for the three-ton salad in a 10-foot-wide bowl at the Angusto Convention Center.

Their [illegible] bonds were filled with cheer

CONTINUED A11

Economy absorbing shocks of turmoil, but for how long?

By Amando Doronila

[illegible] BEFORE THE CROWDS OF THE MEmoyo administration reached its turning point on July 8, 2 weeks that in fact was only a matter of time. Chel Diokno was not where but how President Macapagal-Arroyo would exit. That time declined the demise of public discourse and opened the way to the following months.

During the past five months, the President survived a series of dangerous challenges, ranging from continuing street protests to an impeachment motion in Congress, to the unleashed campaign to bring her regime to an early end. How did she the President survived [illegible] spawn some explanation.

Equally begging explanation is why the drive to oust her has lost momentum, leaving her opponents reduced to an exhausted rabble struggling to keep the embers of unrest alive through a mock people's court trial. Five months after the July 8 fault point, Mr Arroyo has withstood to the bunker the siege of the streets. Despite the destabilizing political turbulence, the country's precarious fiscal position has [illegible] fortified.

ANALYSIS

On the contrary, the peso, whose exchange rate has always been watched as the indicator of monetary stability, recently staged a rebound. The most recent opinion poll shows that the fall of the President's popularity has stopped and that she has regained public approval by nine points.

This rebound should by no means be taken neither as the beginning of a sustained turnaround of the fortunes of the country nor a premise that the President

ECONOMY, C3

Groups to restore 1M hectares of rainforests

By Blanche S. Rivera

ENVIRONMENTALISTS ARE TAKING their battle against mining and logging to the field, literally.

Ten Haribon Foundation and the Rainforest Restoration Initiative (RRI) have launched the "Rainformation Organization and Adoption DEADS in 2020," a campaign to restore one million hectares of Philippine rainforests in the next 15 years.

The massive reforestation campaign comes amid controversial decisions by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources to promote mining and allow logging in a protected area.

"It is an urgent call ... The 2006 memorandum order to resume logging operations of San Jose Timber Corp. within the Sierra Island Nature Park makes this call even more urgent," Haribon and the RRI said in a joint statement.

Environment Secretary Michael T. Defensor signed on Aug. 16 an order allowing the STC, a logging firm owned by Sen. Jose Potes Ejercito, to cut [illegible] trees in the 29,000-hectare SINP, a globally significant biodiversity site.

"This crucial decision is giving the wrong signal to the forest restoration work in the country. Attempts to

CONTINUED A11

A2 PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER MONDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 2005

Second FRONTPAGE

WEATHER FORECAST

'House, not impeachment, to blame for budget delay'

By TJ Burgonio and Christine O. Avendaño

OPPOSITION LEADERS YESTERDAY SAID the House of Representatives had only itself to blame if Congress fails to pass the proposed P1.006-trillion national budget for 2006 before the recess.

Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel Jr. and Sens. Sergio Osmeña III and Jinggoy Estrada, all congressional allies that their failure to transmit the General Appropriations bill to the Senate was an offshoot of the prolonged impeachment proceedings against President Macapagal-Arroyo.

"Budget approval is not delayed by impeachment hearings but by the inability of House leadership that wants to go where GMA goes," Pimentel said.

Osmeña expressed surprise the budget delay was being blamed on the impeachment proceedings. "Was there an impeachment proceeding in 2000? Because the passage of the 2000 budget was also delayed," he said in an interview.

Speaker Jose de Venecia and Rep. Rolando Andaya, House appropriations committee chair, had admitted that Congress would not be able to pass the 2006 budget this year and had blamed the impeachment proceedings for delaying the budget deliberations.

But Pimentel and Andaya said that in the first months of 2006, the government will have to operate under a reenacted 2006 budget.

Osmeña, however, remained optimistic that Congress could pass the 2006 budget by January next year if the House would transmit its version of the budget in early January.

"It will take us three weeks to review it at most if we can get to the budget. We may need one or two weeks more of hearings. And one week to sign the report and another week to debate it on the floor," he said.

Senate President Franklin Drilon said the period in which a reenacted 2006 budget would be in force next year could be shortened if the House would submit the budget bill to the Senate in January.

Under the Constitution, appropriation bills originate in the House of Representatives and are sent to the Senate for approval.

Osmeña said reenacting the budget would delay the release of the pay increase of government employees and military personnel, as well as allocations for infrastructure and other basic services, among others.

Malacañang, however, has not completely given up on the budget.

Yesterday, it urged Congress to try to pass the budget this year as it underscored the importance of the government having a new budget by the New Year.

"It is important to the national interest that the members of both the Senate and the House of Representatives, regardless of their political affiliation, focus their efforts on the passage of the 2006 budget," Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye said.

Bunye said the proposed P1.056-trillion budget was the "backbone" of the government's economic reform agenda, the "anthem" of its pro-poor programs and an "instrument" of empowered governance.

"This document will play a crucial role in the life of every Filipino, historically economic takeoff and build the necessary infrastructure to enable more investments and commercial expansion," he said in a statement.

Crime victims score JDV meddling in case

By Tarra V. Quismundo

POLITICIANS SHOULD NOT INTERVENE WITH JUSTICE, said Dante Jimenez, founding chair of Volunteers Against Crime and Corruption.

Jimenez had only biting words for Speaker Jose de Venecia, who and the other day that he favored "giving the maximum punishment short of the death penalty" to Spanish-Filipino rape queen Francisco Juan "Paco" Larrañaga, who was convicted along with six others in the brutal rape and murder of the Oriang sisters in Cebu City in 1997.

"JDV, the Speaker, should keep his hands off the (affairs) of the judiciary. He should refrain from issuing irresponsible statements considering that he is the third highest official of the country ... For me, his statements were bad and very revolting," Jimenez said.

De Venecia had issued the statements after the Spanish newspaper El Pais reported on its website on Nov. 23 that he had promised "clemency or pardon" for Larrañaga. Like the Catholic Church, the European government, De Venecia is against the death penalty.

Last week, President Macapagal-Arroyo herself assured visiting Spanish officials that Larrañaga's execution would be deferred while she was in power.

An angry Jimenez felt that De Venecia had no business issuing such statements, saying that comments on a judicial decision amounted to a breach of the separation of powers between the legislature and the judiciary.

"I learn as, member of human rights, that politicians are intervening with the wheels of justice. They are compromising the law for political considerations and the Church, that's why we have the very violent reaction ... We really abhor this. This is unfair and unjust," Jimenez said.

Jimenez became active in the anti-crime movement after his brother was murdered several years ago.

He said Thelma Cheung, mother of the victims, called him yesterday morning to express her disgust over De Venecia's statements. Jimenez said the woman's brother "is weeping for decade" of families who had been lured over to crime.

"This administration has no political will to implement the law. If he (de Venecia) wants to meddle with the death penalty, he should gather his fellow lawmakers and talk about amending the law," Jimenez said.

He said the VACC would send a letter to the Supreme Court to officially question De Venecia's statements on a conviction the high court had already upheld.

Or Mr Arroyo's reported statements to stay Larrañaga's execution while she was President, Jimenez said: "Well if she sticks to that position, that's very unfortunate."

Larrañaga is the son of former Basque colonel Manuel Larrañaga and Filipina Margarita Gonzalez and is a member of the influential Osmeña clan of Cebu. He along with six other members of affluent families were convicted and sentenced to death for the rape and murder of the sisters Jacqueline, 23, and Maria Ara Oriang, 20, in Cebu City.

The Supreme Court affirmed in 2004 that the trial was marred by irregularities but the Supreme Court eventually upheld the conviction and upgraded their original sentence of life imprisonment to death by lethal injection.

Spain and other European governments and institutions, which are averse to the death penalty, have been pressuring the Philippine government to pardon Larrañaga.

Marcos edicts keep GMA in power—Etta

BACOLOD CITY—A SHOTGUN DEATH has dashed the President Macapagal-Arroyo and her predecessor have kept intact the presidential decrees that allowed strongmen Ferdinand Marcos to maintain absolute power for more than 20 years.

Bishop-elect Rep. Emilio Ong Jr. Ong, said Marcos' children at the University of Negros here on Tuesday, they saw such decrees granted Mr Arroyo "darker authority" to appoint over 10,000 government officials "from every town, hole and barrio to position," making the whole Philippine bureaucracy "subservience to the President."

Besides and Mr Arroyo said former President Corazon Aquino, Fidel Ramos and Joseph Estrada never bothered to engage the decrees because they helped leverage their power into a formidable power center.

"(Mr Arroyo) is one of the most powerful presidents in the world because of a gargantuan regimen she inherited from Marcos. The agency enables her to appoint people in the Cabinet including some officials like the assistant to the national department heads," she said.

Congress or the Supreme public "should get rid of this authority of hers," Romero said.

She said Mr Arroyo's second-term most government officials had helped her even some calls for her ouster following allegations that she cheated in the 2004 presidential elections.

Besides this seemed the President of using tactics employed by Marcos to quell protests. She said President Cheney 500, which Marcos issued in 1985, had been cited as basis for the proclaimed preemptive response policy of her administration under which protesters have been busted down.

She said another decree requires the government to unnecessarily appropriate payments for debt servicing, ridiculing the claimed-allowed backgrounders to influence government policies.

Besides said Aquino should have rescinded the directive but instead gave it more life by passing Executive Order 272. Vincent Cabreza, *PDI Northern Luzon Bureau*

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End of Luisita strike seen

By Jo Martinez-Clemente
PDI Central Luzon Desk

HACIENDA LUISITA, TARLAC City—The striking workers at Hacienda Luisita will not have to spend another Christmas on the picket lines if the results of Friday's negotiations between the sugar estate's management and its agricultural workers are any indication.

Lawyers for Hacienda Luisita Inc. (HLI) and the United Luisita Workers Union (Ulwu) said the over a year-long strike would be over as soon as the few remaining issues between management and the workers were resolved.

Lawyer Vigor Mendoza III, HLI spokesperson, said they were ironing out "just a few loose ends."

Nenita Mahinay, Ulwu counsel, said the strike would likely end next week.

"*May konti pang inaayos* (There are still a few things to settle)," she said.

An Ulwu press statement confirmed the two unions at Hacienda Luisita (Ulwu and the Central Azucarera de Tarlac Labor Union or Carlu) were "on the verge of signing their respective agreements with management which may finally end the most controversial strike in the nation's history."

Thirteen striking workers and supporters died in separate violent incidents that occurred during the strike. Among the victims were Tarlac City Councilor Abelardo Ladera and Carlu president Ricardo Ramos.

The resolution of the labor dispute between Ulwu and HLI had been made a pre-condition for Carlu to sign its own memorandum of agreement (MOA) with management.

Members of Ulwu and Carlu struck simultaneously on Nov. 6 last year after negotiations for a fresh collective bargaining agreement (CBA) for Carlu collapsed and after management terminated 326 farm workers, including Ulwu officers.

While the issues with Carlu were resolved in October, the signing of the MOA was delayed pending the resolution of the issues with Ulwu.

HLI management had recognized the need to resolve the issues with both unions at the same time.

An official of Jose Cojuangco and Sons, Hacienda Luisita's managing firm, earlier said it was important to resolve the issues with the unions simultaneously as they were picketing the same premises.

The official said the unions should now lift their pickets to open the gates of Central Azucarera de Tarlac (CAT), the sugar central at the estate.

Negotiations between Ulwu and management, which were deferred following the murder of Ramos on Oct. 25, resumed on Nov. 9.

Ernesto Teopaco, CAT vice president, brokered the talks with Ulwu. He also headed the negotiations with Ramos and Carlu.

Ulwu, in a statement, said the terms of agreement were based on a seven-point proposal they presented. These included the payment of wages and benefits due to permanent, seasonal and casual workers; the giving of retirement packages to 15 terminated permanent workers, and the rehiring of 52 workers.

Ulwu also proposed managing the harvesting of the remaining sugarcane at the plantation and asked HLI management for financial assistance for crop production for each Ulwu chapter.

'Nothing behind Saycon arrest'

A LAWYER FOR former Public Estates Authority chair Ernest Villareal yesterday said neither politics nor harassment attended the arrest of civil society personality Pastor "Boy" Saycon just before the long weekend.

Villareal had filed a P10-million libel suit against Saycon last August (not in 2003 as the earlier story said) for which a Makati court issued an arrest warrant two weeks ago.

Villareal filed the case after Saycon accused him of involvement in alleged corruption attending the construction of Diosdado Macapagal Avenue in Pasay City.

Villareal's lawyer, Ruy Rondain, said there was no harassment involved because the warrant was issued days before it was served on Saycon at his Ayala Alabang residence at 6:30 p.m. last Friday.

Arresting a suspect late on a Friday or over a weekend is prohibited since one would be hard put to post bail with offices closed.

In Saycon's case, since Monday was declared a nonworking holiday by President Macapagal-Arroyo in observance of Bonifacio Day, he would have had to sit in jail three days.

On Saturday, Saycon turned himself in and posted a P10,000-bond with the Office of the Clerk of Court in Makati and was granted temporary liberty by Judge Selma Alaras.

His lawyer, Leonard de Vera, claimed it was a deliberate effort by the people behind the "harassment" to have the warrant served on Friday night so that Saycon would have to spend three days in jail.

"This to us is a pure case of harassment. There seems to be too much politics behind the case... we know Mr. Villareal is close to the powers-that-be," De Vera had said.

"I don't know the powers-that-be Mr. Saycon was referring to but if my client was indeed close to powerful people, Mr. Saycon would not have been able to evade arrest on Friday night," said Rondain.

"The warrant of arrest would have been [served] much earlier if we were really close to anyone so influential," he added.

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BRANCH DIRECTORY

Mindanao leaders say Islamic state would eat them alive

ZAMBOANGA CITY—LOCAL EXecutives of several provinces and cities in Mindanao have rejected the inclusion of their respective areas in a proposed Islamic state, according to Mayor Celso Lobregat.

Lobregat said this was the consensus reached by local executives of the city, Isabela City, Pagadian City, Dipolog City, Dapitan City and the provinces of Zamboanga del Norte and Zamboanga del Sur during a forum held here over the weekend.

Earlier, the city's Sangguniang Panlungsod passed a resolution opposing the tripartite initial agreement between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) to divide Mindanao into areas designated as ancestral lands and homelands to be governed by the MILF for the "Bangsamoro People."

Lobregat said this would be a "complete setback" since the region would be gobbled up by the MILF once Mindanao was partitioned.

"We will be eaten up alive," Lobregat said, "if we Mindanaoans do not react."

Local executives of General Santos City and Sarangani province also want to be excluded from the Islamic state.

The MILF earlier said it would propose the holding of a plebiscite aimed at carving out a separate homeland in Mindanao.

Major Pedro Aabanon said the inclusion of General Santos and Sarangani in a separate state would derail the area's progress and could fuel further misunderstanding between Muslims and Christians.

Aabanon said that residents of General Santos and Sarangani had already spoken during earlier plebiscites aimed at expanding the area of the autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao.

During exploratory peace talks in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, last September, the government and the MILF successfully hurdled the most difficult issue on the agenda—territorial domain.

The addition of the ancestral domain second in the five-point one agreement signed on August 3 (2005) and reiterated and Development (2002) completed the requirement of the Tripoli Agreement on Peace of 2001.

Rolly San Juan and Agadin Zamar, PDI Mindanao Bureau

Moro groups want US soldiers out of Sulu

DAMBAGA CITY—MUSLIM ORGANIZATIONS in Mindanao are calling for the immediate pull-out of American troops from Sulu for allegedly violating the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA).

The Union of Muslims for Morality and Truth (Unimom) and the Concerned Citizens of Sulu (CCS) called for the immediate withdrawal of US soldiers had participated in operations against the Sayyaf bandits and gunmen loyal to Nur Misuari Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) chair Nur Misuari.

"What would US soldiers be doing within the perimeters of the area of encampment right after the bombs have fallen in Indanan if they were not party to the military offensives?" Jo-b Commodore Tetangco Talawan said.

Talawan, who is also a convener of the CCS, said his staffers, Ustadz Salahuddin Jaraani and Musa Duyan, confirmed that four American soldiers were sighted during military operations in the villages of Bagsilan, Timbangan and Bato Bato in Indanan town.

"This is a palpable act of intervention of the US military in the internal affairs. They should stop pretending to be peacemakers when they are in fact the biggest provocateurs and warmongers in the world," Talawan said.

Human Rights Commissioner Jesner Nasser Marohomsalic, head convenor of Unimom, said the US intervention "highlights the danger posed by the VFA which it open to exploitation by training US troops."

"The alleged involvement of US troops in the military attacks in Sulu is a direct violation of the 1987 Philippine Constitution which prohibits foreign military troops participating in direct combat operations on Philippine soil," Marohomsalic said in a statement.

US Army Lt. Col. Mark Zaiser, public affairs officer at Joint Special Operation Task Force Philippines, confirmed the American troops were "simply rekindling humanitarian help to the people."

"We are not in any way involved in military operations conducted by the Philippine Armed Forces," he said.

Zaiser said they had been in the area since October for the implementation of projects in Datamian, Jolo, Indanan and Parang towns.

"We are in Sulu as per request of the Philippine government and we are here in main, same as other Filipino soldiers," Zaiser added.

The humanitarian help, Zaiser said, consist of new schools and water systems in Sulu.

But Talawan said the humanitarian missions were "merely a cover for the true agenda behind their presence in our province."

Jaler Bajuela, PDI Mindanao Bureau

Cops turn to computers for help

CRIME-FIGHTING CHIEF WILLIE MIJARES said he thinks crimes occur in under police deployment were effective, according to a senior police official.

Deputy Director General Avelino Razon Jr. said the police, in a few key cities, now use computers to create graphs of crime incidents.

"Through statistical [computer statistics], we found out that our [police] deployment was wrong. In many areas, we deployed more men during the day when there were more crimes committed at night," Razon said.

The official clarified that he is not saying there is a night area "not the code of thumb."

"It depends on the precinct commander, but now deployment is [based] by context," he said. "If precinct commander is [based] by urban, rural and urban centers (areas in between)."

There are about 115,000 uniformed and non-uniformed police personnel, a chief of them on duty at any given time.

The Quezon Police has found a similar computer program to plot crime data on a chart. In Brgy. Leonardo Santiago, then provincial police chief, developed the program and offered it to the best other provincial police stations.

Razon said he got the idea of using computers from a book on the crime situation in New York City. When the New York Police District started using computer models to plot crime rates and occurrence, the NYPD's deployment of resources became more effective. It helped bring down crime rates, according to Razon.

Leila A. del Puerto

'Tay, ang Puso mo!

Hinay lang sa maseswang na kanalan, maseswang kanloran at maseggerong kasemkuhan ngayong Pasko! Huwag kalimutang umnom ng COR-30 araw-araw para tulungan kayong umiwas sa atake sa puso.
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Corrections

IN THE NOV 25 issue, a caption for Maureen Amander's column, "Without Batting an Eyelash," on Page C2 of the Lifestyle section erroneously identified the couple in the photo at right. They are Sandor Tanyeco and his wife Mona Rotinsulu Tanyeco and not Sidey Delgado and his wife Mandyla la Torre.

* * *

IN YESTERDAY'S issue, a News story on Page A20, "National writers widow steps out in the face of fire," misspelled the surname of National Artist for Literature NVM Gonzalez. The name ends with a "z" not an "s." The same error appeared in the photo caption that accompanied the story.

* * *

THE DAILY GOSPEL

Monday, November 28, 2005
1st Week of Advent

1st Reading: Is 2:1-5
Gospel: Matthew 8:5-11

At that time Jesus entered Capernaum, an army captain approached him to ask his help, "Sir, my servant lies sick at home. He is paralyzed and suffers terribly." Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him."

The captain answered, "I am not worthy to have you under my roof but just say the word and my boy will be healed. For I myself, a junior officer, give orders to army soldiers. And if I say to one, 'Go,' he goes, and if I say to another 'Come,' he comes, and to my servant, 'Do this,' he does it."

When Jesus heard this he was astonished and said to those who were following him, "I tell you, I have not found such faith in Israel. I say to you, many will come from east and west and sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the feast in the kingdom of heaven."

Commentary:

"I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. Just give an order and my boy will be healed." A statement of obedience, of knowing whose authority you live under and whose authority is over you and powerful. This is a military man who knows that before the face of Jesus, his authority is nothing. Who do we obey? Who do we belong to? What Army are we? Perfect. "How can only mere mortals like myself dare to be with you, my God of Hosts. He tells us that our divided hearts and fears that subsist beautifully in the service of God and those in need. Come, Lord Jesus, come!

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Filipinos in denial over flu–health exec

By Cristabel V. Reguerra

FILIPINOS ARE LARGELY "IN DENIAL" ABOUT bird flu, adding to the gravity of the problem when the virus finally reaches the country, a senior health official said yesterday.

Dr. Enrique Tayag, the government's chief epidemiologist, said officials were facing a hard time convincing many residents in the barangay level to prepare for the deadly virus.

Bird flu has killed at least 62 people, mostly in Vietnam, and continues to spread from Asia as Europe despite stringent measures.

Health Secretary Francisco Duque III said on weekend it was likely the virus would reach the country; it was just a question of when.

"There should be enough fear among the people," Tayag, head of the Department of Health's National Epidemiology Center, told the business. "But so far, the public is still in denial."

Tayag said the attitude came about largely because there has not been a single bird flu case in the country.

Two to three weeks ago, he said, businessmen of the National Avian Influenza Task Force had gone around 46 provinces to drum up awareness about the impending arrival of bird flu in the Philippines. The problem was the response was not the same, say, from residents in Bulacan or from provinces that have no wetlands to worry about, he said.

"Some people don't seem worried because they've yet to encounter a case in their respective areas," he said. "That's not the right attitude."

He said a common question officials found hard to answer was when the virus would arrive in the country.

"It's very difficult to tell because it can happen anytime within the next two weeks or in the next several months," he said. "We don't want to start a panic but we also cannot assure the public that we would known by five from bird flu."

Tayag urged local governments to put up their own crisis committees to allow efficient reporting and management of cases even before a pandemic breaks out.

The World Health Organization earlier warned the time was ripe for another pandemic and it would most likely come from bird flu. The fear is that the virus might develop a strain capable of moving from person to person.

In the Philippines, among the quickest local governments to respond was Candaba town which is a pit stop of migratory birds from affected countries like China.

Singapore announces scholarships

THE SINGAPORE EMBASSY IS RECEIVING applications for the Dr. Goh Keng Swee (GKS) Scholarship.

The grant was established by the Singapore financial community to honor former Deputy Prime Minister Dr. Goh Keng Swee who helped realize the city state's economic growth and development.

The GKS Scholarship is awarded to outstanding individuals from the Asia Pacific region who wish to pursue undergraduate studies in approved disciplines at Singapore universities. The course of study should be relevant to the financial sector.

Applicants must have outstanding 'O' level or equivalent qualifications. Those about to enter or are already in university may apply. Applicants must be fluent in English and preferably below 22 years of age.

Application forms may be obtained from the technical cooperation officer of the Singapore Embassy, 35th Floor, Tower 1, The Enterprise Center, Ayala Ave. corner Paseo de Roxas, Makati City. The telephone number is 892 751-2045; fax 892 759-5270. Requests for forms must be accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope. Deadline for the submission of applications is Dec. 20.

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Groups to restore 1M hectares of rainforests

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campaigners DOSRI's capacity to ensure change has been retained amply because prominent Iloilo political and other interest groups prevail," Hanlon and the ISPR said.

Culmination of signature drive

Hanlon cited studies showing that illegal logging, mining and other extractive activities continued. The Philippines would have only about 320,000 ha of primary forest left by 2010.

The RONE to 2020 campaign was the culmination of Hanlon's one-million signature drive against commercial logging and mining in natural forests, Hanlon executive director Aniceto Pilar Jr. said.

Hanlon began collecting the signatures in February, or two months after Dinah Bondoc and Leni Lobo disappeared and killed thousands of people in Quezon, Aurora and other parts of Luzon last year.

Native species, rainforests

The RONE to 2020 differs from other reforestation initiatives in its use of purely native species and its focus on rainforests or rainforestation.

The Philippines used to import seedlings for the government's reforestation campaigns. The DENR has a reforestation target of 86,000 ha every five years.

Hanlon has identified 170 priority sites for conservation, including forests that are rich depositories of flora and fauna. These are Philippine Eagle areas, "important bird sites, watershed priority areas, protected areas, ILA (timber license agreement) areas, geothermal reserves and mangroves.

Planillo said the endorsements could involve local government units, communities, religious groups, youth and other groups.

National consultation

Hanlon led a national consultation on rainforest restoration on Nov. 16-18, bringing together about 150 representatives of indigenous peoples, funding agencies, nongovernmental groups, the DENR and private stakeholders. They discussed the strategy for RONE 2020.

"Despite the many investments infused in the forestry sector ... policy as well as operational reforms remain missing," the group said.

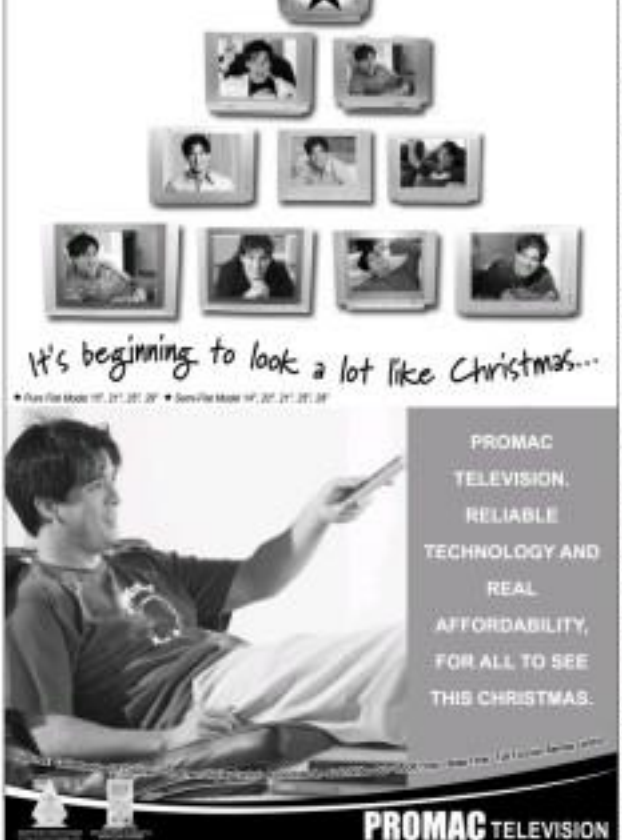
"Such investments fail to address the issue that the country's forests are in critical condition. (Their) perpetuate the limited view of forests as simply sources of timber and mineral wealth and not the backbone for biodiversity and critical ecological services," the RONE 2020 campaigners said.

A recession study done by experts on the biodiversity of the SMNP in 2001 showed that the park was worth $15.5 billion over 25 years, with a net projected value of $12 billion.

In contrast, the estimated value of lumber deposits in the park is pegged at $21 billion.

The RONE is a major component of the $114-million Samar Island Biodiversity Project, which has been supported by international groups because of the global significance of its flora and fauna.

Environment Secretary Heherson Alvarez has said that Samar, one of the poorest islands in the country, should learn to open up to sustainable economic and logging if it intends to improve its economy.



Garcillano spent his time reading, writing

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tion election commissioner said he was reading past him science. It was titled "Why Worry: How to Live Without Fear or Worry."

Written by Sen. Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda, the book deals with "fear and worry (that) seem to be part and parcel of human existence." The 68-year old Garcillano told the Inquirer in a monosyllabic interview in Cavite Khalookan yesterday.

The man who had been the target of massive criticism for allegedly helping President Macapagal-Arroyo cheat in the 2004 election and who had become the butt of acrimonial jokes talked to the Inquirer for almost two hours inside a heavily tinted van.

Although he looked as a man on the run, Garcillano looked like he had even put on weight. He wore a green polo shirt and had a faded red Muslim scarf slung over his shoulders.

Like a spring

Garcillano said he stumbled upon the book after dropping out of public view about five months ago.

The book may like a spring in the wilderness, he said.

"While reading it, I began to realize that I should not worry too much," he said, pointing in the distant jungle and the mountains beyond it.

"This is where I live. Here people respect me, love me," he said.

Peace somewhere

Parting possibly his most trying time, Garcillano tried to give the impression of "being a man who enjoyed to have found tranquility in the middle of nowhere.

He claimed to be "at peace" with "Maxim/brothers."

He was not apparently always on the run.

Away from public scrutiny, Garcillano said he had a chance to start drafting his autobiography.

"I have been keeping myself busy and writing some of the memoirs that I may be able to make use of later on," he said.

Planting trees

Hours before the interview, Garcillano even found time to take a stroll in a spring.

When not jotting down his thoughts, he said he would plant rare crops and fruit-bearing trees.

"I love farming," said Garcillano, who owns a farm in Bukidnon.

"I've been here for the last 44

GARCILLANO yesterday

years," he said of Mindanao, recalling that he first set foot on the island when he was assigned as Comelec special attorney in Iloilo in 1961.

He eventually settled in Cagayan de Oro City after marrying his wife Grace.

Everything for power

As said privacy was relative in a man-zoo-repose, but "I have power; I have everything. I'm more comfortable here among my friends."

While in hiding, he said he saw a lot of things that should be "corrected" in this country.

"I'm very much disenchanted because our leadership is not interested in the welfare of our people and the country. Our leaders (they would like to grab power, they will do everything even to the damage of the country. They're not interested in improving the economy of the country."

At his age, he said he had seen enough to confidence him that the country was in a deep rut.

Plans for the future

Does he have plans for the future?

"I want to rest for a while, to stay in the farm may be. I'm still going to (plan out what I will do for the next few, 10, 15 years. As of now I don't want to get any government posts."

If possible, Garcillano said he wanted to go back to Iloilo one of these days, to fulfill the book's end goal—to start making the most out of life to "give fresh inspiration and hope to whoever reads it without cynicism and doubt."

All this coming from a man whose alleged doctoring of poll results sparked a dangerous political crisis and split the country apart.

After comfort women, Japan helps elderly

By Nikko Dizon

AFTER OFFERING APOLOGIES to Filipino "comfort women," the Japanese government has lined up more humanitarian projects for the elderly, this time for the mostly veterans of World War II atrocities but of present-day poverty and neglect.

The Japanese Embassy in Manila said the projects include the renovation, equipment upgrade, and service improvements of the geriatric clinic in the Philippine General Hospital, the Golden Acres Home for the Aged in Quezon City and a similar home run by the Bishop Feliciano Foundation Inc. in Bulacan, Bataan.

The embassy marked the "success" of Japan's compensation program for Filipino comfort women in a function last week honoring three ranking Philippine government officials for facilitating the program from 1997 to 2002.

Tokyo's Ambassador to Manila Ryuichiro Yamazaki gave commendations to Chief Presidential Legal Counsel and former Justice Undersecretary Merceditas Gutierrez and to former Social Welfare Undersecretaries Belinda Marcelino and Lucrecia Balanon.

"Without their roles as leaders of a task force that determined and helped Filipina comfort women obtain redress through the Asian Women's Fund, ... Established in 1995, the AWF is a private sector initiative supported by the Japanese government which has helped Tokyo "extend consolation and support" to the aging victims, an embassy statement said.

"In the Philippines, in spite of the difficulties anticipated because of the delicate nature of the issues involved, AWF activities were successfully implemented through the devoted efforts of the task force," the embassy added.

From 1997 to 2002, the AWF provided every identified former comfort woman with 2 million yen, along with "a letter of sincere apology and remorse" from the Prime Minister of Japan, and medical and welfare support worth 1.2 million yen from the Japanese government.

The WORLD

Editor Lawrence B. Casco

White House leans toward Iraq pullout

WASHINGTON—THE WHITE HOUSE ON SATURday for the first time claimed ownership of an Iraq withdrawal plan, arguing that a troop pullout blueprint unveiled this past week by a Democratic senator was "remarkably similar" to its own.

It also signaled its acceptance of a recent US Senate amendment designed to pave the way for a phased US military withdrawal from the violence-torn country.

The statement by White House spokesperson Scott McClellan came in response to a commentary published in The Washington Post by Joseph Biden, the top Democrat of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, in which he said US forces will begin leaving Iraq soon year "in large numbers."

Even though President George W. Bush has never publicly issued his own withdrawal plan and often refused calls for an early exit, the White House said many of the ideas expressed by the senator were its own.

In the statement, which was released under the headline "Senator Biden Adopts Key Portions Of Administration's Plan For Victory In Iraq," McClellan said the Bush administration welcomed Biden's voice in the debate.

"Today, Senator Biden described a plan remarkably similar to the administration's plan to fight and win the war on terror," the spokesperson went on to say.

He added that as Iraqi security forces gain strength and experience, "we can lessen our troop presence in the country without losing our capability to effectively defeat the terrorists."

McClellan said the White House now saw "a strong consensus" building in Washington in favor of Bush's strategy in Iraq.

According to Biden, the United States will move about 30,000 servicemen out of the country by the end of 2006, and "a significant number" of the remaining 130,000 the year after.

The blueprint also calls for leaving only an unspecified "small force" either in Iraq or across the border to strike at concentrations of insurgents, if necessary.

Less than two weeks ago, McClellan blasted Democratic Representative John Murtha, saying that by calling for an immediate withdrawal from Iraq, the congressman was "endorsing the policy positions of Michael Moore," a celebrated anti-war Hollywood filmmaker.

Biden's ideas, relayed first in a Nov. 21 speech in New York, however, got a much friendlier reception.

The Biden plan calls for preparatory work to be done in the first six months of next year, ahead of the envisaged pullout. AFP

Suicide bomber blows up gas station in Iraq

SAMARRA, IRAQ—A SUICIDE BOMBER DRIving a pick-up truck ploughed into a petrol station in northern Iraq Saturday, setting off a fiery explosion that killed at least five people and injured 16, the army said.

The attack on the outskirts of Samarra, some 125 km north of Baghdad, devastated the petrol station and set a dozen cars ablaze, police and witnesses said.

The bomber "drove up in an old pick-up truck with three drums in the back," said Hatem Hamed, a 25-year-old employee of the petrol station.

"He arrived at the gate and tried to enter, but couldn't get very far because there were other cars in the way. Then he shouted 'Allah Akbhar' (God is great) and blew himself up.

"The raging fire caught the cars one by one," according to Ahmed who was slightly hurt.

Nuri Mosir, 40, who helped run the petrol station, said he was in the office when the bomb went off.

"When I rushed outside there were people with their clothes on fire," he said.

Samarra hospital doctor Khalil Ahmed said five received the bodies of six people killed, including the bomber, among them 16 injured.

In other violence, three Iraqi soldiers were shot dead north of Baghdad and a US contractor and four Iraqis were wounded in a bomb blast targeting a US military convoy in the capital.

The US military also announced the death of a US soldier killed on Friday when his vehicle hit a roadside bomb in Hit, western Iraq.

His death brings to at least 2,132 the number of US military personnel killed in Iraq since the March 2003 invasion, according to an AFP toll based on Pentagon figures.

Meanwhile, Iraqi aide to President Jalal Talabani suggested that some rebel groups were ready to engage in the political process, after Talabani appealed for them to renounce violence and join a dialogue. AFP

Gopal Godse, coconspirator in Gandhi slay, dies

NEW DELHI—GOPAL VINAYAK GODSE, THE last surviving conspirator in the assassination of Indian independence leader and pacifist icon Mohandas Gandhi, has died at age 86, media reports said.

Godse died at his home in the city of Pune late Saturday, the Press Trust of India news agency quoted his son Hasta Godse as saying. No cause of death was given and family members could not immediately be reached.

Godse, whose brother Nathuram shot the pacifist who led India to independence, served 20 years in jail for his involvement in the 1948 killing.

Godse remained unrepentant for his role in killing Gandhi—who fought for equality in a nation deeply divided by caste and is revered as one of the most revered men in modern history.

"He was a very cool person for the Hindus," Godse said of Gandhi in a 2003 interview with The Associated Press.

Godse believed Gandhi turned his back on Hindus, allowing British India to be divided in 1947 into today's states of India and Pakistan.

In the eyes of Godse and his small band of Hindu extremists, Gandhi's calls for nonviolence were part of a plot to allow Muslims to be slaughtered by Hindus.

Godse was the last surviving member of the group that conspired to assault Gandhi on Jan. 20, 1948. That evening, Gandhi, a frail 78-year-old, was walking toward the prayer ground in the garden of a New Delhi home when Nathuram Godse stepped in front of him and fired three shots. Nathuram Godse and another man were hanged for Gandhi's murder.

"He did not want this man to live," Godse said in the interview. "He did not want this man to die a natural death, even if 10 lives were to be lost for that purpose."

After his release from jail Godse lived in Pune, largely living off royalties from books he wrote on Gandhi and the assassination.

He is survived by his wife Hindha Godse, a son and two daughters, PTI reported. AP

Russia's troubled Chechnya votes for a new parliament

GROZNY, RUSSIA—CHECHENS WERE voting on Sunday for a regional assembly that is unlikely to appease anti-Moscow rebels but is expected to cement the power of a local pro-Russian strongman.

The poll marks the end of a unilateral peace plan drawn up by Moscow for the turbulent region. With a parliament, it will have all the government functions needed to make it—on paper—a normal part of the Russian state.

The voting started at 8 a.m. amid high security and the region's pro-Moscow president, Alu Alkhanov, was among the first to vote in his home town of Urus-Martan, predicting at least 70 percent of turnout.

"We've been through the phase of military action. Now we've begun reconstruction," Itar-Tass news agency quoted him as saying on the eve of voting. "Now we're starting to build a republic with all the necessary trappings."

President Vladimir Putin, who sent troops back into Chechnya in 1999 to end a brief period of effective independence, has said the poll will allow "difficult questions to be resolved openly, in a civilized way, and not through force."

RIA news agency quoted Alkhanov as saying that four repentant rebels took part in the race for 18 seats in the regional assembly's upper house and 40 seats in the lower chamber.

"This shows once again that we are on our way to democracy," he said. "Our policy is targeted at uniting the people. We should help those who want to return to peaceful life."

Seven parties are taking part, but few doubt that people loyal to Deputy Prime Minister Ramzan Kadyrov—the de facto pro-Moscow leader of the region—will pack the assembly.

Kadyrov's power stems from his thousands of irregular troops—most of them, like him, former rebels—that are accused by rights groups of brutality against local people in their fight for control.

"The non-Kadyrov figures will be a minority and will be subordinate to the pro-Kadyrov majority," said Boris Makarenko, an analyst from the Center of Political Technologies.

The rebels, whose battle for independence has included killing many civilians, call Kadyrov a Russian stooge and say the poll will do nothing to persuade them to disarm.

"The upcoming elections have nothing in common with a real political process. All it does is push further away the day when there will be a real political solution, and lead to the expansion of the theater of war," Akhmed Zakayev, rebel envoy abroad, told a London conference on the eve of the poll.

"The responsibility for the consequences lies with the Russian government."

The 100,000 Russian troops in and around Chechnya, along with Kadyrov's irregulars and other pro-Moscow Chechen forces, face separatist attacks daily. Russia does not publish a death toll, but observers say the war may have cost as many as 20,000 soldiers' lives.

Some officials have put the number of dead for the 11-year war, including civilians, as high as 160,000. *Reuters*

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Terror plot to kill judge in Saddam trial thwarted

BAGHDAD—IRAQI POLICE SAID THEY HAD uncovered an al-Qaeda cell plotting to kill the chief judge in charge of holding the case against ousted Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, whose trial is rumored to resume on Monday after a five-week recess.

"We arrested 12 members of a cell linked to the Iraqi branch of al-Qaeda during a dawn raid on a house in eastern Erbil," in northern Iraq, police Col. Anwar Kader said Saturday.

"They confessed during questioning to planning to kill chief judge Ibrard al-Ashi this week."

Ashi is the chief of a panel of seven judges on the Iraqi High Tribunal which is tasked with judging former regime officials, including Saddam, for crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide.

Kader said all the suspects were Iraqi Sunni Arabs from Kirkuk, from Saddam's hometown of Tikrit or from the Sunni triangle area.

Kirkuk, which is 250 kilometers northeast of Baghdad, is the centre of Iraq's Kurdish community.

Kader said all the suspects were Iraqi Sunni Arabs from Kirkuk, from Saddam's hometown of Tikrit or from the Sunni triangle area.

Kirkuk, which is 250 kilometers northeast of Baghdad, is the centre of Iraq's Kurdish community.

The 12 suspects also confessed to helping to carry out suicide attacks in the Iraqi Kurdish city of Sulaimaniyah in October in which 19 people were killed, he said.

Security will be a top priority when the trial of Saddam and seven former henchmen resumes Monday in Baghdad on charges of killing 180 men and women from the Shiite town of Dujail, north of the capital, after the former leader escaped an assassination attempt there in 1982.

Saddam, 64, who refuses to recognize the court, said his former aides have pleaded not guilty to the charges. They face the death penalty if convicted.

Saddam is likely to face a raft of other charges, ranging from his invasion of Kuwait in the north of the country in 1990, to that of Shiites in the south in 1991, and crimes committed during the wars against Iran and Kuwait.

Iraqi officials said they themselves are with the Dujail case because it is relatively straightforward and well-documented. AFP

SADDAM in Dec. 19, 2003 photo

Saddam: 'No. 1' who led Iraq to war and ruin

BAGHDAD—SADDAM HUSSEIN, PRAISE THEM, many a torturer as defending a country and leading thousands of his citizens and led others brutally into a ruthless quest he represented supremacy.

Regime groups have amply documented the cruelty of Saddam, who at an initial court hearing on Oct. 19 pleaded not guilty to charges of crimes against humanity over a Shiite civilian deaths in 1982.

The trial resumes Monday with daily hearings scheduled through Thursday, which prosecution witnesses are likely to be heard.

Saddam, whose name in Arabic means "the stubborn one" or "he who confronts," sat a defiant figure in court last month, refusing to state his name to the judge, questioning the trial's legitimacy, and feuding with guards.

A figure who even today in shackles and under US custody inspires fear, investigative judges refer to Saddam as "Mr. No. 1."

The sustained dictator's habit of submerging all his orders to silence that were carried out has backfired against him, according to a senior close to the investigation. "Everything was filtered."

Future court cases will revolve around his government's links to the killing of tens of thousands of Kurds and savagely crushing a Shiite uprising in 1991.

Under Saddam's leadership from 1979 to 2003, the Baath regime ordered many dissident eye-out of, tortured, imprisoned, summary executions to death, and tens of hoped to have unleashed dozens of women his prosecution.

A former CIA psychologist once described Saddam, now 64, as suffering from "malignant narcissism," which he blamed on his cruel childhood upbringing.

Saddam was born poor in a mud hut village near Tikrit on April 28, 1937, was reared or reared or a young age and raised by an uncle who was a foe of Abdul Karim and a supporter of Iraqi ideology.

He narrowly his imprisoned years and rose to Iraq's highest office, built the grandest of palaces, wanted three sisters and his two sons-in-law to death.

Dubbed by self-to pursue an historical figure and cult of personality some big victory—on his 66th birthday he ordered a bombardment of the Israeli territory which is his own blood.

He groomed two of his sons, Uday and Qusay, to succeed him. As adults they quickly became hated for their use of torture and rape rooms. They were killed during a gunbattle with US forces in the northern city of Mosul in July 2003.

Their father first made a name living to murder Iraqi president Abdul Karim Kassem in 1958.

Wounded in the leg, Saddam fled abroad but returned four years later and was said to have been arrested as he had escaped and resumed clandestine work for the Baath, a nationalist and socialist party dedicated to bringing about an "Arab rebirth."

In 1968 he took part in the coup which brought the party to power. AFP

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Millions in China city to have water again after huge toxic spill

HARBIN, CHINA—The 3.8 million residents of Harbin in China were due to have their water reconnected Sunday, five days after supplies were cut due to a massive toxic spill snaking its way through the city's river.

As the 80-km belt passed the northeastern city on its way downstream to Russia, China made a formal apology in its neighbor for the benzene spill heading towards the Amur river—known in China as the Heilong river—that marks the border between the two.

Some 100 tons of benzene was dumped into the Songhua river, a major tributary of the Amur, on Nov. 13 after a huge explosion at a chemical plant in the province sent 80,000 cu meter from Harbin and 1,000 km from the Russian border.

Public water supplies to Harbin were cut on Tuesday as the government assembled drinking water into the city on board a heavily armed train.

After more than five days without main water, residents were expected to have water back before midnight.

Water samples taken in Harbin near there on trace of the chemical, cause media quoted local officials as saying Sunday.

"The latest inspection result shows that by 6 a.m. on Sunday no benzene was found in the water at Sifangtai, the water source site in the upper reach of Harbin section," Xinhua news agency said.

"The inspection level has met the national standard with a concentration of 0.0262 mg/liter," it said, citing Lin Qiang, spokesperson for the Heilongjiang Provincial Environmental Protection Bureau.

Premier Wen Jiabao, who arrived in Harbin Saturday, ordered officials to begin dowsing their water sources toward the lower reaches of the Songhua river where the toxic slick was heading.

He insisted that pollution levels should be promptly and publicly reported.

"Local governments must follow the polluted waters through the cities, towns and villages along the rivers and make prompt public reports on the latest monitoring results," Wen was quoted by the Heilongjiang Morning Post as telling officials.

"Every available measure must be taken to ensure the drinking needs of the people and the quality of the water."

Following the fire, 11 chemical blast in a Petrochina benzene plant, officials in the province sowed up the water pollution disaster for 30 days.

The calamity has been widely seen as a reflection of China's increasingly dismal environmental situation, which has been largely ignored during 25 years of fast-paced economic growth.

Despite panic buying of water and food supplies in Harbin last weekend, the city has responsibilities the crisis rather subdued, with the government reporting zero cases of benzene poisoning and no pollution-related fatalities.

Wen Jiabao in downtown Harbin in his hanging premiere to report on river monitoring efforts to their Russian neighbors.

"We must strengthen our cooperation and measures with Russia in a friendly and responsible way and give them reports on the monitoring efforts," he said.

On Saturday in Beijing, Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing informed Russian Ambassador Sergei Razov about the pollution situation along the river and expressed regret over possible harm to the Russian people.

The slick was reported to reach Russia within days.

President Vladimir Putin's envoy to the Far East, Kamil Iskhakov, told regional media outlets Saturday that there was no reason for residents living near the Amur river to panic.

"We will know at least a week before the chemical spill reaches Khabarovsk," a city of 600,000 people, Iskhakov said.

Despite its booming economy and rising living standards, China is facing a severe water shortage because of rising pollution, which could undermine if drastic measures are not taken.

China was "facing a water crisis more severe and urgent than any other country in the world," Vice Minister of Construction Qiu Baoxing said earlier this month before the Beijing spill.

"We've got to tackle the problem before it is too late," warned Qiu. AFP

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SPORTS

E-mail: pi_sports@inquirer.com.ph

Editor Teddyvic S. Melendres

Aiot of color ushers in SEA

Dance and musical magic dazzle as battles commence on all fronts

By Jasmine W. Payo

BRINGING TRADITION AND technology together, the Philippines raised the grand curtain on the biggest sporting event in the region at dusk yesterday.

In an opening ceremony filled with wondrous scenic, kaleidoscopic festival dancers and audiovisual extravaganza, the 22nd Southeast Asian Games unfurled at the mini-walled grounds of the Quirino Grandstand in Manila.

President Macapagal-Arroyo briefly graced the event and officially opened the biennial event, which the country previously hosted in 1981 and 1991.

Held in a public park for the first time in the Games' 46-year history, the parade of the Filipino athletes and sports officials—aiming to win the overall crown—drew the loudest cheers during the ceremony.

As fireworks lit the sky, EP flag bearer Hilton Cojuangco Jaworski marched with the 600-strong contingent looking resplendent in their

ACCT. A24

GOLD, SILVER: Marestela Torres (left) and Lorna Gabica celebrate their 1-2 finish in the long jump. The gold was the Philippines' first in the 23rd SEA Games.

TODAY'S SCHEDULE

A PAIR clears snow from the walkway in the southern city of Bocholt, Netherlands, Nov. 26. An early winter cold spell brought heavy snowfall to parts of Europe over the weekend, paralyzing public transport and roadways.

Winter freeze hits Europe, suspends flights, cuts power

PARIS/BERLIN — A FROZEN WINTER FREEZE gripped parts of northern Europe on Saturday with heavy snowfalls cutting power, canceling football matches and spreading air and road traffic chaos.

In Paris, the Eiffel Tower was shut for most of Saturday as ice made its staircases treacherous, while heavy snowfalls swept thousands of people in France and Germany faced plummeting temperatures without electricity.

"We hope power will be restored tonight. Our teams are out there working on it," a spokesperson for Electricite de France said. Some 7,000 homes out of 17,000 that suffered power failures in France's western Vendee region overnight were still without electricity by nightfall on Saturday, she added.

A quarter of a million people were also without electricity in Germany's most populous state of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), authorities there said on Saturday.

Soccer fans in the Belgian city of Liege were disappointed when a keenly awaited clash between Anderlecht and Standard, two giants of the premier division, was postponed because of the cold. A Germany league match between MSV Duisburg and Cologne was also postponed because of heavy snow.

Air traffic also suffered from the snow and ice. Flights in and out of airports in Paris, Brussels and the north German city of Dusseldorf, the NRW state capital, were all affected.

A Dusseldorf airport spokesperson said 36 flights had to be rescheduled and 25 were cancelled. "I have been working at the airport for 11 years and I cannot remember something like this ever happening before," spokesperson Torsten Klemmann said.

Brussels airport said it too had experienced cancellations and delays, while a spokesperson for France's Aeroports de Paris said 22 flights from Charles de Gaulle airport were grounded.

"It's mostly because of snow on the runways," he said.

The Paris region saw about 5 cm of snow and in northwest France there was up to 10 cm. The climatic conditions also threw the northern half of Spain under a bad weather alert, and closed several mountain passes.

Officials said the cold danger, however, was extreme cold.

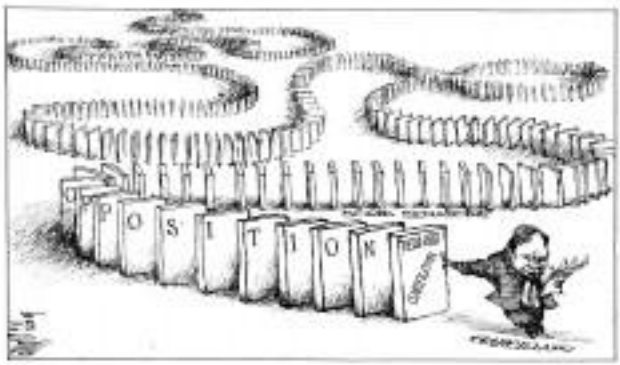
The French government declared a level one state of alert...deemed when daytime temperatures remain negative and sink to between -5 and -15 degrees Celsius at night — under its so-called Winter Plan to prevent the homeless, for just over a third of the country.

That came after two homeless people died in France during the past 48 hours due to the intense cold.

Reuters

INQUIRER

OPINION



Triumph of spirit

THE LAST TIME THE PHILIPPINES HOSTED the Southeast Asian Games, in 1991, the country was suffering through a season of self-doubt. The effects of the December 1989 coup attempt—the most devastating of the many attempts at a military takeover since the fall of the dictatorship—continued to weigh down on the economy. The debate over the closing of the US bases

EDITORIAL

continued to cast a pall on the country's diplomatic, military and trade relations with the United States. The turmoil over the landmark Generics Act and the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program revealed the deep social fissures that continued (and still continue) to divide the country. Not least, the infamous power shortages that eventually blackened the map had started to sap an entire people's resolve.

And then for the first time since the SEA Games started in 1959, the country came within one magical gold medal of winning the overall championship. As the gold medals accumulated with each passing day, the country's attention was drawn to the medal tally. Public support for the country's athletes reached new heights, and a spirit of optimism, nurtured on a can-do attitude and a conviction that every Filipino, regardless of political persuasion, was pulling in the same direction, seemed to hover in the chilly December air.

The euphoria, of course, did not last.

But the disorderliness of that experience has encouraged the current administration from hoping for a repeat. From the President on down, government officials can see a welcome respite from the usefulness of politics, Philippine style. In fact, the SEA Games may be one reason why the controversial ex-election commissioner, Virgilio Garcillano, chose this time to climb above ground.

President Macapagal-Arroyo told sports editors she invited to Malacañang: "Let's concentrate on the athletes, blowing away as many lines on blackening. I've invited the opposition to come watch the opening (Tuesday). Sports, as you know, is a unifying element in society."

Her spokesperson, Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye, repeated on the theme: "The SEA Games should ignite the passion of all Filipinos to rally behind our athletes and our nation and carry the torch of unity throughout the land by setting aside our differences and work towards the betterment of our society."

The administration's eagerness to use the SEA Games to spark national unity is, well, transparent. Its maestro, after the Hello Garci tapes came out, and after the impeachment bid failed in Congress, has always been: Move on. Set aside our differences and move on.

But it would be churlish of us, and short-sighted of anyone, to begrudge the administration the very opportunity to appeal for national unity. We must, after all, rally behind our athletes. And it is still the administration's responsibility beyond a doubt, to call on the public to support the athletes carrying our colors.

But the administration is mistaken if it thinks public interest in the Games, along with the national euphoria in the event we duplicate our feat in 1991, excuses it from unphasing, in full, Garcillano's role in last year's elections. Or accounting, in full, for the other scandals and controversies that have undermined its capacity for governance.

So let us all celebrate the Games. Let us follow the progress of our national athletes, many of whom have endured unimaginable sacrifices to be able to compete in the country's name. Let us watch the events in the different venues, rooting for the home team while always throwing a sincere courtesy to all visiting teams. Let us cheer for the underdog, whether he carries our flag or some other country's, because he personifies the triumph of the human spirit. Let us applaud the truly exceptional athletes, whether they carry our flag or some other country's, because their story of achievement and excellence is our story too. Let us support the Games, bearing with the additional volume of traffic, helping keep the streets and the venues clean, extending our brand of hospitality to participant and spectator alike. Not least, let us hold firmly to our say, and all pull in the same direction. The glory any athletes will earn belongs, not to anyone in particular, but to all of us.

But will the people believe Garci?

AS I SEE IT

Neal H. Cruz

THE NARROW ESCAPE OVER THE INJECTED conversation of Harrison Commissioner Virgilio Garcillano. Of course, he is the one who disappeared after he was caught on tape talking with President Macapagal-Arroyo supposedly in a plot to cheat in the elections. Now he has sent word that he is ready to tell all, and his relatives in whose custody he is being kept say that the same may they assisted the movie sequels "The Return of Exito," "The Long Hunger Rides Again" and "Election Returns." The Palace and its allies are happily preparing for his return-like it is the Second Coming because he has threatened to name opposition leaders who allegedly told him during the elections. "The drama is supposedly meant to blackmail the opposition into shutting up on the Garci tapes."

Even before he shows up, Garci is already making somersaults over the issues of the moment. On line, he and National Security Adviser Norberto Gonzales are running a mockery of the whole Congress by making all sorts of demands. "Ah dee! Pi million!money on my hand. Ah dee! Pi million!" he screams. Gonzales has even told the press the sort of coverage he wants for himself: As if it were a dog obeying the command of the master, the House promptly granted both demands.

As for Gonzales, he is still in ransomeye of the former Speaker's Bolong connection shamed by Sen. Jinkee Arroyo for refusing to answer questions on the Wanda contract that he signed. First, he feigned illness in order to avoid his confrontation in House Correct instead. Then he would not be there "for the sake of the hour" so that he would be cut free from security while still maintained on having a "hour by pass operation." Then he returned to work at the National Security Office without answering the senators' questions on the Wanda contract. And the campaign reaches and the questions were forgotten by the senators, especially Senator Arroyo, as though they were suddenly smitten with amnesia. Has a prey out of there.

What the drama is at this Congress is slowly losing respect and credibility as the curtain. One branch slowly chips away at its authority. Besides, there are Executive Order No. 464 which was issued by the President and allows officials and employees not to testify at congressional hearings; the Cabinet-Congress Response (CPR) policy on cases pending; and the order preventing military officers from answering on pain mooning.

This is a pity because Congress is the only co-equal branch of government left. The Supreme Court is now perceived to be too tilted to favor the President it helped put in office. All those officials and [illegible] Congress is taking without fighting back, as if asking not from the executive service of Sen. Raul Manglapus to restrain abuse to be raped. Pardon the comparison.)

During his long absence, Garci obviously had time to concoct his story for his hardest hard time to watch him[illegible], and now he is ready with it. He is supposed to deny there was any cheating for his Glue despite the evidence of the tapes (which is why Malacañang is very happy over his reappearance) and to name opposition leaders who also called him during the polls.

But will the people believe him? Highly a presumption for an admission of guilt and Garci already confronted himself when he refused to answer questions on the Garci tapes and even went to Hong Kong.

"Garci's story" is obviously calculated to bring closure to the issue of his Garci's legitimacy. But it will just be Garci's word against the evidence and the testimony of other witnesses. And for as long as there are questions that remain unanswered, there will be no closure to that controversy.

The only way to answer the questions of whether or not there was cheating in the 2004 presidential election and who really won in the polls, is to recount the votes. This is what Sen. Gloi's allies doggedly pursued in the impeachment trial of Chief Justice Hilario Davide. In the election protest in the Presidential Electoral Tribunal and in the impeachment case. And that is the principal issue against Arroyo, and the root of all her problems. She did too well to her people's and Arroyo's good. As Eugene Perez. To be accepted as President, she must first of all show that she really won fair and square."

This should not be difficult to do, if the PET will only cooperate and resolve "judicial controversy" No. 8. Joaquin Bernas has suggested...for the sake of the nation. The PET will recount the votes for vice president because of the election protest of opposition candidate Loren Legarda against Sen. Noli de Castro. Garci has testified for president and written on the same election returns containing the tally of votes for vice president. It will therefore take no more than a few seconds to look at the votes for president and tally them. If there are discrepancies, it will be the success of the opposition to verify the accuracy of the

A constituent assembly?

SOUNDING BOARD

Fr. Joaquin G. Bernas, S.J.

REPORTS HAVE IT THAT THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES is still not to approve a resolution calling for Congress to meet in joint session, to act as a constituent assembly for the purpose of proposing changes to the Constitution. What for? The hoped-for answers are not, first questions are merely discussing.

First, maybe a resolution necessary in order to set the ball rolling for revising the Constitution? Second, if the House should actually pass such a resolution, what opinions would the Senate have for responding to it? Third, if no joint resolution is approved, may Congress still propose changes? Fourth, if the two houses decide to propose amendments in a joint session, how can they do it?

First, a maybe resolution necessary in order to set the ball rolling for revising the Constitution? Second, if the House should actually pass such a resolution, what opinions would the Senate have for responding to it? Third, if no joint resolution is approved, may Congress still propose changes? Fourth, if the two houses decide to propose amendments in a joint session, how can they do it?

Section 1, Article XVII of the 1935 Constitution said that a joint resolution was necessary. The Constitution then said: "The Congress in joint session assembled ... may propose amendments to this Constitution." Thus, there could be a joint session to propose amendments, it was necessary for Congress to pass a joint resolution, through which both Houses agreed to come together. Without such a resolution neither House could get to the other to propose amendments.

That, however, is no longer the language of the current Constitution. Now the text simply says "Any amendment to, or revision of, this Constitution may be proposed by the Congress ..." The "proposal" can mean in that Congress in already a constituent assembly able to propose amendments or revisions to the Constitution. But the empowerment is given to Congress, a bicameral body. Hence, whether joint or separated, both Houses must play an constituent role; hence, there must be a resolution for the other House to do so because it does not meet in joint session.

If the two houses do not come together in joint session, the procedure for proposing amendments or revisions is by a vote in each House, with three-fourths votes of all its Members, and a Constitutional Convention, or by a majority vote of all its Members, submit to the electorate the question of calling such a convention. Votes from Congress must act as a bicameral body.

The things to vote joint questions. Should it be Congress as a constituent convention? My thinking on this subject is simple: I do not understand that. Under the present circumstances, an elected constitutional convention, in terms of quality, will be better or worse than the Congress we presently have. Or for that matter, will it vary significantly in terms of the Constitutional Commission which drafted the 1987 Constitution. The delegates will be drawn from the same milieu whence current legislators come and within the same limelight the same flattery-drowned process.

Now, it has been argued that the current vice that must be reached if Congress were unicameral, which it is not. At least for that as a guide for a bicameral body. And I suggest that the procedure I have outlined is a legitimate bicameral reading of the constitution.

Incidentally, even if Congress decided to meet as constituent assembly and decides instead to call a constitutional convention, we still will have to deal with the same methodical vote. The Constitution must originate in Congress, by a three-fourths vote of two-thirds

Media are the only avenue left for expressing legitimate dissent

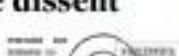
[illegible] to express his or her opinions on any issue...whether for or against. That makes democracy alive. But now that the public's avenue for expressing outrage through mass demonstrations has been effectively denied by the wrong-use tactics of Ebdis. Meaningful surveys and hot touchstones, the media...newspapers, radio and television—have been left as the only groups where one can freely express illness or grievance.

How are is making the media so timid themselves of what she calls their "bad boy image." She sees the media as had because the things they do are help build a good public image of herself. She believes that the media are responsible for her outstandingly distinct feelings in the last term. Quite does she realize that the media are but a mirror which reflects the opposite of the object before it. She is the one responsible for how the leader behaves the

reading or viewing public.

I find sad to read the reasons of some readers who ask people to stop the "dadshow" and concentrate instead on the work that needs to be done. Some of these are very telling people to just forget the controversies and the wrongdoings. Waiting for the betterment of the nation is well and good, but refraining from acting as a watchdog on the government and criticizing the misdeeds of those who lead us will only aggravate the already grave situation.

Corruption is pervasive enough and politicians on both sides of the fence cannot feign ignorance of the sinful conditions under which most Filipinos are living. Even then, "Pandemic" [illegible] activity like many-splendid corruption and the many members of the opposition), have the duty to relentlessly examine and criticize government actions, otherwise the powers that be will neither have the



[illegible] someone to push on with their [illegible] tion. We, readers, and members of the general public, should not waver in our resolve to express approval or disapproval of deeds or bad ones as serious.

I [illegible] is continuously but I find hope in its appeal to the workers of the world. It calls on them to "see to completion in the face of rampant corruption and dominion arrogance of power." I therefore appeal to overseas Filipino workers around the world to unite and help our suffering country and countrymen. Free themselves from the bondage of poverty and seek a better future for their children.

—RANDOLPH U.G.A.
fu88dy@aol.com

High wages don't make better teachers

ALLOW ME TO COMMENT ON EDUCation Assistant Secretary Camilo Miguel Montoya's statement about doubling the teachers' salaries. (PDI, 11/30/05) I fully agree our public school teachers (as well as all other professionals) should be paid very high salaries so that the noble teaching profession would attract the best—although high salaries do not necessarily assure the [illegible].

Many teachers deserve very good pay because they are really good. But many others do not deserve what little they receive because they do not know how to teach. It does not follow that if their salaries are raised, they will become teachers who are [illegible] and competent.

If you continue to think of it, many retirees are teachers do their jobs better than the regular ones. Teachers do not turn from bad to excellent by adding several thousand pesos to their paycheck. I think it will only encourage more bad teachers.

I hope a merit system is put in place so that both economy and skill are appropriately, financially rewarded. What can be very disappointing is for a teacher with real teaching skills receiving much less than someone with less skills just because the latter is more senior and/or has more titles attached to his/her name. (MDs or even a Ph. D., or lack of such degrees does not necessarily reflect a teacher's ability.) Our teachers need to be substantially rewarded for their performance, not just for their academic credentials.

We, please remind our students who do not qualify to become teachers. And yes, please, increase the teachers' salaries. But do not just reward just the underserving students. Reward the undeserving teachers as well. Or if still possible, reward, reward them, no matter the high investments.)

Teachers who do not know how to teach simple multiply their errors exponentially. Students who have been taught wrong by incompetent teachers because the pay is good, and they might even think they do not know it, are in deep trouble.

—BEN ABARCO, SWISS, CH.
PO Box 88726,
4000 Cotabato City

Brother Eddie's foe used as pawn

ONE CLOWN, BRO. EDDIE VILLANUEVA and [illegible] Broadcasting Network, are scandalized to reply to Belinda Olivares-Cannon's (Oct. 8 column).

Contrary to her claim, there was no "judicious determination of facts" prior to the issuance on April 6, 2005 of the arrest warrant against Brother Eddie. No hearings or investigative proceedings were conducted to determine if the charges of the warrant was justified. In fact, Brother Eddie discovered that a case had been filed in court against him and has a warrant had been issued for his arrest long after April 6.

Contrary to Cannon's claim, Brother Eddie's motion for reconsideration was filed on May 3, 2005 with the Mandaluyong prosecutor's office, not with the court. That is the same office that later denied his motion and railroaded the finding of probable cause against him. The finding was prepared in the media even before Brother Eddie was subpoenaed.

Contrary to Cannon's claim, the arrangements between ICH and Broadcasters was for the turnover of management, programming and [illegible] of Channel 53 to a public relations company that was to be promptly incorporated, not to Solomon's Brothers. The P13 million paid to Brother Eddie was pocketed money, not part of the amounts due to and payments to ICH for the commitment of Brothers was for P100 million. Solomon never paid the balance.

Solomon's claim that Brother Eddie allegedly sold or lent the same thing that was sold to ten others of VTV Corp. and "falsely represented" to him that there was no impediment to ICH's entering into a contract with Brothers are false. The PSW requirements between Brother Eddie and Solo did not ripen into definitive agreements due to VTV's decision to back out of the deal. Each VTV claims in agreement with ICH was rescinded. ICH was free open to enter into a contract with Falconer, on the 2003 negotiations of ICH and Falconer, Amanda was promptly informed of the lobbied deal with VTV. He even conducted a due diligence audit of ICH and examined documents showing the transaction with VTV. VTV personnel like Tito Domingo, who handled Amanda's advice, confirmed Amanda's prior knowledge of the lobbied VTV deal.

Indeed, Amanda cannot say that Brother Eddie fooled him because he and Daniel were able to actually take over Channel 53's management from June 2005 to July 2005, unreasonably profiting themselves by airing CNBC programs and collecting advertisements. Amanda probably all earnings but refused to pocket for his end of the bargain.

It was Amanda and Daniel's that arranged Brother Eddie and ICH to the last meeting (PDI) [illegible] goodwill money and P121,625,000 to Channel 53 entities coin). The totality case Affair is politically based Brother Eddie, a staunch critic of President Arroyo. [illegible] Amanda, a close cousin of First Gentleman Mike Arroyo, is being used as a pawn.

—GORIO NICOLAS GAPUSAN,
Vice Chancellor Regarding Legal
Law Offices,
14/F Roma 2000 Building,
6 Quezon Ave. Road,
Quezon Center, Pasig City

Not to worry about one-year VFA limit

SOME LAWYERS ARE CONcerned that the Bales multiple rape case allegedly involving six US soldiers is in danger of being dismissed because of paragraph 6, Article V of the Visiting Forces Agreement, which provides that if "the Philippine Authorities preconditions are not completed within one year, the US shall be relieved of any obligations..."

Such fear may not be real.

The VFA agreement speaks of "judicial proceedings." The supposed period of 365 days (which covers the hearings that start with the city prosecutor up to the appeal to the Justice secretary) gives the Department of Justice to examine its preliminary investigation and is not part of the judicial proceedings.

The phrase "judicial proceedings" means "hearings and trials" conducted by a court of law which is under the judicial branch of the government.

"Preliminary investigations" are administrative hearings done by the DOJ which is under the office of the President. If the criminal complaints are dismissed by the DOJ, they do not reach the courts for trial.

The one-year period for judicial proceedings will start upon the filing by the public prosecutor of the criminal information in court and when the accused [illegible] are brought to and arraigned before the court.

In the event, enactment of the VFA [illegible], will allow this case to go beyond its one-year limit, notwithstanding the efforts of some parties to delay this case.

One year is more than enough time to try and resolve this case.

—LEONARD S. DE VERA,
chair, Legal Restitution Affairs Movement (LEGIT), Penthouse E,
Windsor Tower,
167 Legaspi Street,
Legaspi Village, Makati City

Across the NATION

NorthRail transfers 11,200 families

DELECTABLE
A child gets his fill of Guimaras mangoes, which the province takes pride in.

NHA says it beat deadline set by Vice President

BOCAUE, BULACAN—THE NATIONAL HOUSING Authority has moved out at least 11,200 families from the right-of-way of the NorthRail project in Bulacan, beating the December target set by Vice President Noli de Castro, NHA general manager Federico Lana said on Sunday.

Lana said the number of families already relocated represented 90 percent of the number of households living along the tracks of the Philippine National Railways Corp. in Bulacan.

The families have been transferred to six relocation sites in the towns of Meycauayan, Marilao, Bocaue, Bulakan and Guiguinto and Malolos City since October.

The resettlement areas in Bulacan cover 750 hectares and are developed by private companies under the government's P6.5-billion relocation program for the 48,500 families along the PNR'S route in Metro Manila, Bulacan and Pampanga.

China loan

The project's first phase, which China has funded with a $400-million loan, involves 32.14 kilometers from Caloocan to Bulacan. The second phase's 58-km segment extends up to the Clark Special Economic Zone in Pampanga.

Lana said 4,000 families that have yet to be resettled in Bulacan have opted to take the agency's "hulog-pabahay" (return to the province) assistance worth P1,000 each.

"We have substantially cleared the areas and are focusing now on post-relocation assistance like livelihood," he said.

The state-owned North Luzon Railways Corp., he said, has no reason to defer the start of the project given to the consortium, Du Chiline National Machinery and Equipment Corp.

Lana said the NHA is expected to begin in January the relocation of 19,500 families in Pampanga.

Continuing protest

But while the relocation in Bulacan beat the target set by Ize Castro, who is also chair of the Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council, urban poor groups continue to protest.

Residents have devoted the first week of December to rallies to stop the demolition of houses and to demand affordable housing sites from the government.

Jess del Prado, of the Bulacan Urban Poor Federation said the ULPOFF, NHA, PNRC and the local governments had local mayors' agency councils managed to relocate the Bulacan families by "deception, intimidation and force."

"We were promised 14 [sic] of relocation, most of which did not come. They are now just to remain in our of the tracks, most sitting on long problem of having no funds to our house," Del Prado said.

"Today told that you can't do anything because the (NorthRail) is a government project, or you're going to lose your chance to get a house," said resident Corazon Ortega. [courtesy of Ong, PEFC/14-44-02/2000-2bad]

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Peace zone in Sagada holds after 17 years

By Desiree Caluza
Pilipinas Luzon Bureau

BAGUIO CITY—SINCE ITS DECLARATION as a peace zone in the Cordillera 17 years ago, the tourist town of Sagada in Mt. Province has been peaceful.

Thomas Killip, presidential assistant for Cordillera affairs and former Sagada mayor, said Sagada became a zone in 1984 for negotiations for the release of seven policemen who were taken prisoners by the communist New People's Army.

The town also witnessed their release, he said.

During a peace dialogue at the University of the Philippines Baguio, Killip said even while there was no conflict between the military and the NPA when the peace zone was established in 1988, the peace mechanisms still cover other armed conflicts involving or even minor disputes anywhere whenever they seek their services and assistance.

He said the Sagada peace zone also became a venue of the latest preliminary peace consultations between representatives of warring villages of Bagtang (now) in Kadaclan and Sewangan (now) in Bontoc in Mt. Province for the reconciliation of their peace pact, which, for the last two years, resulted in the death of 12 people.

Peace needed

The peace zone was initiated by Sagada community members in 1988 when armed conflicts between government soldiers and communist rebels escalated.

Nor gripped the community because the tendencies could no longer work in their farms, said Killip.

"It was one of the most complicated problems that the community ever encountered. Unlike in the past when the community could easily determine who were soldiers and who were hostile to the community, the armed protagonists in this are were people from the Cordillera, members of the same ethnic backgrounds, and worse, could be relatives," he said.

He said no culture would strongly abhor or eliminate whose relatives or members of the same tribe would kill each other in their own place.

"For the community, this was another type of war situation never to before experienced and with so easy solutions in sight. What time was the mechanism appropriate for the situation?" he added.

He said the community members decided to form a body, representing various sectors, to push for agenda for peace. The other functions of the body would be to hold dialogues with the military and the NPA to set policies and ordinance the community's interest.

Talks

The zone was used for peace negotiations not only for the ongoing hostilities between the military and NPA but also for the other types of conflicts such as tribal wars or inter-community conflicts.

Killip said indigenous cultures and practices must be respected as all times.

"In the community, it was better to do something than to sit and watch their children being killed left and right. To the community, it was far better to come up with a mechanism for self-preservation so that few people would become victims of a shooting now," he said.

However, he said many community members were aware that the purpose of the community mechanism for peace and survival was to stop the war because it was a natural phenomenon which needs a "natural solution of sorts."

"While many were also aware that it may not be a perfect mechanism, many want that it is still an important instrument for the protection and safety of people especially civilians," he said.

When peace groups and mechanisms learned about the existence of a mechanism, they offered their services by facilitating dialogues with military officials and the government's peace commission, he said.

These groups popularized the term "peace zone" in reference to Sagada's peace initiatives.

At first, when the concept of peace zone was proposed to back conflicting parties, there were reservations, suspicion and outright opposition.

For the military, the concept is the handiwork of local officials sympathetic to the NPA while the NPA thought that it was a part of a low-intensity conflict strategy of the Armed Forces by using the civilian community in the fight against the NPA, said Killip.

Trading post for farmers sought

LA TRINIDAD, BENGUET—The provincial agriculture farmers are asking the Department of Agriculture to help institutionalize a marketing scheme that will enable them to directly sell their produce to Metro Manila's public markets.

The scheme will call for the establishment of more stalls and spaces in selected public markets in Metro Manila where farmers themselves can guarantee a steady supply of highland vegetables, officials of the Benguet Federation of Farmers Inc. (BFFI) said.

"Giving farmers direct access to the market will level the playing field with middlemen or traders who, until now, continue to dominate vegetable trading by dictating prices on a day to day basis," said Loreto Bejasen, BFFI public relations officer.

Farmers have resented the fact that retail trading establishments still control the pricing and volume flow of vegetables traded in the vegetable trading post here, Bejasen said.

The producers supplies more than 80 percent of the country's demand for temperate crops such as cabbages, potatoes, carrots, pechay, celery and lettuce.

Bejasen said the DA list tested direct access markets for farmers in the Baguio and Dimasalang and the results had been very encouraging.

"We sold the vegetables at the right prices. The more markets, the better," he said.

He said, however, some customers still preferred to buy vegetables dealt by middlemen. Fidencio Carreba, FOI North-ern Luzon chairman

2 slain journalists buried

SAN JUAN, BATANGAS, THE REMAINS OF murdered Laguna journalist Robert "Bobby" Ramos was eventually at a crematorium in Biñan, Laguna, while radio broadcaster and Bayan Muna leader Ricardo Ding Ug was laid to rest at the Batangas public cemetery on Saturday amid calls for justice for the death of the two.

Ramos' friends and kaval-mates brought his body to the Eternal Gardens in Barangay San Antonio, carrying a hero crossed bearing their editor pastor.

Rain failed to stop mourners from holding a caravan that started around noon from the UG residence at Barangay Bunot in the Sto. Tomas and Tuy Cathedral, a distance of about 9 kilometers.

Hundreds of friends, relatives and supporters, mostly in black shirts, filled the cathedral while members of various progressive groups carrying placards and banners formed the rain outside as the requiem Mass was celebrated.

Marlon Ramos and Bobby Lobodan, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

DINDEN
An unidentified man serves a sidewalk in a street in Cagayan de Oro City into a home, keeping only a pair of slippers and a recycled cotton as his worldly possessions.

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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Hope raised for coastal areas to breathe again

SAN FERNANDO CITY—TERESITA HOPE, after all, for the coastal areas of the country to recuperate from ecological problems that have rendered the bodies of water almost unable to regenerate their marine resources.

While the bays are in a vulnerable state, "there are bright prospects," said Perfecto Aliñar of the University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute Resources Foundation Inc. (UPMSIRFI) that conducted the studies on the coastal waters for the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources-fishery resources management project.

Current conditions and the resource management initiatives in three coastal areas in Luzon—the Lingayen Gulf in Pangasinan, Puerto Princesa and Honda bays in Palawan and San Miguel Bay in Camarines Sur—were presented during the Luzon cluster workshop on Nov. 23-25 here.

BFAR Regional Director Hector Fernandez said the workshop seeks to consolidate information and experiences in the bays as vital inputs in the formulation of the Sustainable Philippine Fisheries Agenda.

Time is ticking for the bodies of water where human activities, like overfishing and illegal fishing are the driving factors behind the environmental degradation. The sanctuaries or marine protected areas and strict law enforcement and legislation are being implemented.

The studies showed the Lingayen Gulf is in worst ecological situation with the fishermen's average daily catch per gear at only 2.7 kilos or less.

Without any intervention such as fish sanctuaries, the gulf can only support 9,000 of 16,000 fishers dependent on the gulf.

Most overfished

"It's the most overfished [body of water]. Fortunately, the people have taken steps to restore it," Aliñar said separately.

More than a dozen fish sanctuaries have been established by people's organizations and local governments in the Lingayen Gulf. About 200 hectares were also reforested with mangroves.

Lingayen Gulf benefits from suspension among local officials of the terms facing it. "The gulf is rising up and many good practices are emerging [among the stakeholders]," Aliñar said.

Wilfredo Campos of the DPMBD separated that, to support the 16,000 fishers, at least 40 percent of the Lingayen Gulf must be dedicated to sanctuaries (areas closed to fishing) to enable the gulf to regenerate its dwindling fishery stocks.

The San Miguel Bay which is only three-fourths the size of the Lingayen Gulf, is in a better situation as the average daily catch is 4.2 kilograms a day, the highest yield among the bays studied.

The bay can support all of its 6,000 fishers without any intervention such as sanctuaries, but if 40 percent of the bay is converted into sanctuaries, it can support up to 11,000 fishers.

Problems

But like Lingayen Gulf, San Miguel Bay still has to contend with illegal fishers who use the 3-shell (tranch) to catch fish. These vessels destroy coral reefs.

Puerto Princesa and Honda bays are sustainably support a maximum of about 1,500 fishers or 50 percent of the current fishers, without sanctuaries.

To support almost 3,000 fishers in these bays, at least 50 percent of the areas should be converted into sanctuaries, according to the studies presented.

Overfishing in Puerto Princesa Bay across seven municipal waters from Bay and deployment of sanctuaries alone is not sufficient to prevent collapse of fisheries in Puerto Princesa and the Bay area.

Rhonda Ariola-Puerto, PDI N. Luzon Bureau

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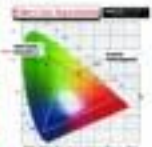

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No stoppage of power supply in Cebu, says gov

By Jolene B. Balumbos
PDI Visayas Bureau

CEBU CITY—THE POWER CRISIS IN CEBU has been averted after Cebu Private Power Corp. (CPPC) agreed not to suspend the operations of its power generation in Barangays Binits Norte and continue its negotiations with power distributor Visayan Electric Co. (Veco).

Cebu Gov. Gwendolyn Garcia on Friday said the CPPC and Veco reached a compromise agreement during a marathon closed door meeting she initiated on Thursday afternoon.

She, however, declined to say what transpired during the meeting except to say that CPPC would continue supplying power to Veco despite the expiration of their interim agreement on Friday.

Among those who attended the meeting were Roger Lim, CPPC general manager; Al Alcuitz, Veco vice president; and Energy Regulatory Commission officials.

"They agreed between themselves that there would be no stoppage of power supply since the interim agreement expires (Friday). Both have agreed in upholding public interest," said Garcia.

"Hopefully, other issues surrounding the entire situation will start to unravel so that they may have more harmonious relationship. They're trying hard to hammer out a workable solution," she added.

Garcia said she would call another meeting with officials of the National Power Corp. and the National Transmission Co. on Nov. 30 to get the entire all-power supply to the province.

Garcia called for a meeting with Veco and CPPC officials on Thursday after the CPPC announced it decided to suspend operations of its power generation plant in Binits here on Saturday due to a dispute with Veco over the computation of the interim supply contract with the power distribution firm.

The agreement, which expired on Friday, allowed a pricing mechanism to determine the rates charged by PPC for power supplied to Veco.

Veco said in a statement that it "never shut its down computation" although it found CPPC's proposal unacceptable because the "prices were high and "grossly disadvantageous to customers."

It pointed out that the original terms of the Power Supply Agreement signed in 1997 set CPPC's price at 1 percent less of Napocor's selling price.

The CPPC supplies 22 percent of the requirements of Veco, equivalent to 62 megawatts. Veco is serving more than 230,000 households and 20,000 businesses in the cities of Cebu, Mandaue and Talisay and the towns of Minglanilla, Naga, San Fernando, Consolacion and Liloan.

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Panibagong Paraan

CONCEPT PAPER FORMAT

Page 1:

ENTRY FEE: (pls. check one)
- ☐ Indicate the specific category: _____
- ☐ Advocacy or Policy/ Action Research on Population and Development
- ☐ Basic Infrastructure and Equipment for Education or Health
- ☐ Biodiversity Conservation, Climate Change and International Waters

PROPONENT DETAILS

Name of Proponent Organization/Institution: LGU:
Contact Person: Position:
Affiliation(s) with any coalition or network (if any):
Contact Details:
Address:
Phone/Fax No.:
E-mail:

Name(s) of Partner Organization(s)/ Institution(s) (if any):
Contact Person(s):
Contact Details:
Address:
Phone/Fax No.
E-mail:

Title of the Project:

Target Marginalized Group(s):
Please specify type and number of beneficiaries (participants)

Equity Issue(s) to be Addressed:

Project Implementation Site(s) (Please specify province and municipality)

Project Duration:

Breakdown of Indicative Budget by Major Expense Category:

	Pantbagong Paraan's Share	Funding Support	Funding Counterpart
Total Cost (Expenses that are to be funded under the above categories)			
Personnel Services			
Capital Outlay (Equipment, Land, Infrastructure)			
Others			
TOTAL			

Pages 2 to 6:

PROJECT QUESTIONS:

1. What is the problem issue or inequity/exclusion that the project will address? What are the causes / roots of this problem or issue?
2. What are the objectives of the project?
3. Who is/are your target group(s) and how will they benefit from this project? How will this project address inequities, or increase / improve opportunities for the target group(s) to contribute to and share in development?

   For action research projects: How will this research eventually benefit the target group(s)?
4. How did the target group(s) participate in the conceptualization of this project?
5. Will the project contribute to addressing the deeper causes / roots of the problem / issue you have described above? How?
6. Where are the innovations in the proposed project? How is your idea different from existing approaches that are addressing the problem(s) / issue(s)?
7. What are the key outputs expected after six months and after one year? What are the major activities that will be undertaken? Please describe the target group's participation for each major activity.
8. How will the project contribute towards building or strengthening partnerships, particularly those between the target group and other parties?
9. How will your project be sustained even after the grant funding? Will the project's same project components be taken over by the target group after the one-year project duration? What are those and how will the target group be prepared for taking over?
10. How can the project be scaled up after the project period, and/or replicated in areas with similar conditions?

ROUNDUP

Payroll money stolen

DAVAO CITY—Two bonded watchmen were robbed on Wednesday while the pay roll money of the Provincial Social Welfare and Development Office (PSWDO) was being distributed to employees P1 million, police authorities said. The money was stolen on Wednesday from the PSWDO branch in Santa Maria, Davao del Sur province, police said. One of the suspects reportedly pointed a handgun at a private vehicle that other was grabbed the money bag before fleeing. Apart from cashier, the stolen money also included funds for Christmas bonuses and cash gifts for the employees.

Ryan D. Rosales, PDI Mindanao Bureau

Taiwanese held in Cebu

CEBU CITY—Police arrest Wednesday Cebu customs house broker arrested a Taiwanese on Thursday while he was about to board a plane bound for Taipei for allegedly possessing illegal drugs. Undersecretary Prosp. Jr. was detained at the Lapulapu city jail after he was charged with possession of illegal drugs in violation of the Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act before the regional trial court. The suspect, along with two other young Taiwanese, was supposed to board the Mandarin Airline flight #3 (CI) for Taipei at about 7 (CI) a.m. when operatives reportedly apprehended him before at the international departure area. Station critical detainment police sources were found hidden in cigarette case after frisked by the police, said PDI Christine Herrera (PDI) in Lapulapu City station.

Jasmin Aguilaar, PDI Visayas Bureau

River dredging OKd

LEGAZPI CITY—Albay Gov. Fernando Gonzalez has approved the resumption of the United Mantuna Corporation's dredging the mouth of Mayon Volcano, said Cedric Daep, head of the Albay Public Safety and Emergency Management Office of the provincial disaster coordinating council. "Gratipayan Pronk Sr. in Barangay Maninila, Guinobatan is meant out from the area more than half of a year ago," Daep said. He said the dredging was recommended after an inspection of the affected channel on Nov. 11. Barangay Maninila passed a resolution on Oct. 9 asking dredging support of the fishermen "I always" Read the resolution on Sept. 11 caused more than thoughts different income.

Dino Rodriguez, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

Wreck protection sought

CEBU CITY—Barangay Local officials of this whale-shark capital of the world is frantically seeking help from private-government agencies to protect the remaining coral reefs in Olango Island, Mayor Celine Osias said this week. Olango Island is about 10 minutes by motorboat off the coast of Barangay Olango and might be touted if not secured immediately. A cannon, she said, had been salvaged from the area and could no longer be found. Residents said the cannon was taken by unidentified armed men from fishermen who fought. She said they have sought the help of the Navy, which have sent navies there but they should still after dining, leaving the cannot unsecured.

Bobby O. Lobaton, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

Church theft appeal

TAGUIG (MAR) CITY—Local officials urged residents to help them identify the people or groups involved in the theft of church artifacts in Cagayan. They said the bands at the 17th year old Church of Tandang in Lubo town were stolen. Residents lamented the disappearance of the 20-year-old bell of the Church of Masapang in Lubo on Sept. They also reported the disgrace of the bronze Coffer Cross.

Edmundson Cuthbert, PDI Northern Luzon Bureau

RP opens quest for SEAG crown with 5 golds

From page A1

record held by Indian Ni Pum Dorj Manjhwar).

Indonesia doubled two golds, one bronze and one silver, vowing Vietnam with a 1-0-3 tally.

Torres saved her best jump of 6-47¼ for last to stamp the women's long jump gold, the country's first, at the expense of compatriot Lerma Belsaotan Gabito at the Rizal Track Stadium.

Though way ahead in the women's 3-meter springboard synchronized event, Perez and Dimension still felt the need to do a difficult backward 2 1/2 somersault tuck position that earned the judges' and the Philippines' second gold at the Trace Aquatics Center in Los Baños, Laguna.

Mendoza and Adora of Cebu followed suit by topping the Latin American category of choreography. The exploits of compatriots Jake Estrella Malimata and Dracilo Gonzales at the Welterweight Final in Lobig.

Not to be outdone, Bacilan and Salvador also ruled the Standard event, edging out Vietnamese Boyen and Muoa Bouen in the Filipinos lived up to their tag as the favorites in the event calendared in the SEA Games for the first time.

Alcaraz, a former SZ Billard Bankit of the Year, bested Cebu pride Hernan Gabito, 5-3, in the finals.

Four feats

Disheartened after feeling four of her first five tries, Torres was already sobbing in the athletes' rest at the center of the field when the crowd prodded her to go on.

Wiping her tears, the five-foot Torres responded with the golden leap that enabled the Philippines to keep its supremacy in the event. Illiza Mae-ai Frondas won SEAG long jump queen for a second eight years while fellow track legend Lydia de Vega-Mercado held the throne in the 1985 edition.

Gabito, the 2003 Vietnam SEAG titlist, cleared 6.45m to handily beat Malaysia's Ogeen Ibe Sui (6.27m) for the silver.

Action in athletics hours up with 13 titles to be disputed today including the Games' heaviest man and woman in the 100-meter dash.

Favorite

Iskandar "Arriek" Sherwarni, the five-foot wonder of Philippine running, is favored to repeat in the 15,000m run, like Danilo Fresnido in the javelin throw.

The 19-year-old Perez, a two-time SEAG silver medalist, and the 18-year Dimension garnered 268 points, breaking aside the challenge of Thais Sukcotai Rattanamon and Supapan Prasertkwan (259.40 points) and Malaysians Leong Mun Yee and Cheong Jun Hoong (258.51).

Perez and Dimension, who topped the silver in the recent Asian Diving Cup in Hunan, China, will join wars today when they compete in the women's 3-meter individual springboard.

Zarella Dimension, Cesar's oldest brother, settled for the bronze medal in the 3-meter springboard individual silver relegating his fourth dive and falling the water open. He wound up with 349.17 points, very off Malaysia's Yeoh Ken Nee (397.89) and Thailand's Suchart Pede (361.20).

Action today

Action in taekwondo, wushu and boxing begins today with a total of 49 gold medals at stake.

Athens Olympian Mary Antoinette Rivera, Jhenal David Ortiz and Edmundo Ea lead the Filipino line in taekwondo, which dangles 16 golds at the Quezon Auditorium.

Ortiz and Rivera will see action in the lightweight matches at 7 p.m., while Jeffrey Figueroa and Loraine Lovelle Catalan compete in the flyweight division.

Go will have his own venue in the bantamweight class, team with Esther Marie Singson in the women's division, Ahmad Rivera and Ernie Elaine Alora in the featherweight class, and Alexander Briones and Maria Cervalde Isaac in welterweight.

The other members of the 30 taekwondo team are John Paul Llanda and Kathleen Feeler Ibera (flyweight), Dax Alberto Marfil and Veronica Domingo (middleweight) and Michael Alejandrino and Sally Gola (heavyweight).

Fencing events

Over at the San Juan Elementary School gymnasium in San Juan, Metro Manila, active opponents Richard Gomez will booster the 80 fencing team gunning for three of the 12 gold medals to be disputed today in the women's individual saber and men and women's individual epee.

With homes in the epee team are Wilfredo Vinzons-Jocilino Ablaza and Armando Weruk in the men's side, Hedene Orendain, Michelle Manconido, Molly Joyce Angeles and Mary Catherine Bong make up the women's side.

The saber team is composed of Rodolfo Pacid, Joanna Princesella, Mac Wendylove Mendoza and Lenita Reyes in women's and Edmund Zafra, Edmund Reyes, Glenn Sooon and Wilbert Mendoza in men's.

Napoleon Mendoza, Reyni, Mancenido, Emerson Dygui, Rolando Cunta Jr., Raniel Endrinal and Mark Dexter Atienza form the foil squad.

Pitaka, the sport which the Filipinos hope to dominate, will have five of the 22 golds up for grabs at the Emilio Aguinaldo College in Manila today.

Vietnam SEAG double gold medalist Philip Nhu and Kevin Ting spearhead the wushu boys' bids to the Jianshu and Daoshu events.

Other wushu events to be played are the nanquan and gunshu (both men and women's).

The Philippines hopes to surpass the six gold medals it won in the 2003 Vietnam SEAG.

AFI-ATIMAN dancers, their bodies painted gold, perform tribal rituals at the opening ceremony of the 23rd SEA Games.

Economy absorbing shocks of turmoil . . .

From page B1

assured of completing her term till 2010, far from it. She is not out of the danger zone.

The rebound mostly tells us that the economy has been resilient and has absorbed the shocks of political turmoil, and should underline the message that if we had not abused the economy, with the unceasing onslaught of the seemingly implacable political impasse, the economy has a reserve of shock absorption capacity to drive an improved economic performance.

Since the days of coups during Aquino presidency, the economy has proved its resilience despite the fact that each of the six or so coup attempts lashed the economy to its knees, especially the 1989 putsch which knocked back the economy to zero growth after climbing beyond 7 percent.

However, there's a limit to how much punishment the economy can take without breaking down in total collapse.

No sign pressure is easing

Although the pressure from the streets has diminished, the resentment overflowing the bottom as the country enters the Christmas holidays, it does not show any sign of being broken in the near term, as the forces continues to reassemble and her enemies continue to deny her any quarter in their campaign.

The stalemate will remain unbroken until one side swims ground. Question is, which side will yield? Who will make the "supreme sacrifice?" Is there room for a compromise? What is the formula?

If politics is the art of the possible, compromise is impossible unless contending sides abandon the notion that, in the current crisis, the impasse can only be broken if one side achieves a total political victory and imposes the terms of unconditional surrender to the vanquished. Both the administration and its opponents are locked into this notion, and are unyielding.

The combatants have yet to fight the decisive battle of this crisis, although regime enemies had thought the administration was on the verge of collapse on July 8, and their deliverance would deliver the death blow.

Their calculations were proven wrong when two totally unexpected interventions saved the government from collapse—that of former President Fidel V. Ramos and the Catholic hierarchy. The interventions halted the momentum of the resignation call.

In no mood to quit

Those led to the prolongation of the stalemate that, until today, seeks a decisive engagement to decide which side will prevail.

Having demonstrated that she has weathered the storm, the President is in no mood to give in to mob pressure or quit. She has let enemies proved that they have the muscle to topple the government through mass action.

There is not even a faint sign that regime enemies can regain momentum and carry on with their campaign beyond staging more rallies and prayer rallies and processions, which are ill-disguised political meetings held in the protective sanctuary of churches.

Unless a decisive event intervenes to break this impasse, it is not hard to see that the prospects for the next year fore-shadow further paralysis of public business and an opposition incapable of dismantling the President through either constitutional or extraconstitutional means.

This impasse has already put the country in a state of uncertainty that partly accounts for public apathy in calls of mass mobilization for political change. There are ample signs of widespread and genuine public claims for leadership change, which the administration cannot and should not ignore. The nation is in an unmistakable mood for leadership renewal.

How she will go?

The token setback to the latest coup leaves the outbreak of the crisis provoked by the disclosure of the Garcillano tapes in June. The key issue is the mode of change—is how will the President go?

The modes so far proposed by regime opponents, as well as well-meaning citizens, including resignation and snap elections, have been regarded as untenable. They were thought to create more problems and divisions than they sought to solve.

The impasse invites intervention and offers temptations for power grabs from non-civil sectors of society. It underlines the importance of a compromise formula that rejects unconditional surrender of power as a prerequisite for political peace.

While the prospects of an end to political strife and paralysis in the new year are grim, we have not reached a dead end in the search of a political compromise. In the next article, I will explore such a compromise formula that will open the windows for political change and national renewal.

I never left RP, says Garcillano

claim that he never left the country. So other sources could be tracked by the Inquirer to verify what Garcillano had said, which we counter to earlier official reports.

'In Singapore on July 14'

The Department of Foreign Affairs, which on Aug. 17 reported that Garcillano arrived in Singapore on July 14, appeared to be standing by that position.

Reached on the phone last night, DFA spokesperson Gilberto Asuncion said in reports on the Garcillano trip was based on information received by the Philippine Embassy in Singapore from that country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Asuncion declined to comment on speculations that another passport traveled to Singapore using Garcillano's identity to throw off those searching for him.

The DFA earlier said it had alerted all its more than 80 missions abroad to look for Garcillano.

Question remains

Garcillano's disappearance for more than 40 days amid the controversy that has provoked plunged the country into the gravest crisis of her troubled presidency, sparked Cabinet resignations and protests across the country, and triggered impeachment moves which her loyal supporters are in the House of Representatives quickly beat down.

Ms Arroyo now appears to be stonewalling the crisis but the one question that has torn the country apart remains unanswered—Did the disease tampering with the poll results start the controversial 10-poll commissioner?

Garcillano was with lawyer Tomas Garcillano Jr., his first cousin, who will serve as his counsel when he goes to Congress to share what he may know on the scandal.

Several Inquirer contacts arranged the two-hour interview.

Garci's lament

Garcillano poured his heart out, lamenting that the public had been "gravely misled" by Ms Arroyo's detractors.

"This coming out soon," he said, but "not necessarily next week."

"It depends upon the situation because we are now trying to contact the witness of mine," he said, referring to the earlier issued by the House of Representatives of me be basement to hearings.

"I don't know if the Supreme Court will decide on the petition that we filed. If the tribunal upholds the assistant's legality I'm willing to face to court. I have nothing to hide," he stressed.

Let people judge

Although his lawyers were still planning his legal moves, Garcillano said he was leaving his fate in the hands of the "Filipino people" who should be the ones "to judge me."

Garcillano remained politically detained appointed the presidential election in June Ms Arroyo, urging critics about the alleged conspiracy to steal the 2004 polls were peddled by opposition leaders. "Ah, accused with their own selfish interests."

"They should not deserve the people. You tell Gloria they should tell the people the truth because we never talked about election operators blasting the national canvassing of votes," Garcillano said.

He said it was impossible for him to oversee massive cheating on people hundreds.

"I'll tell everything that I know—there was no inclination that there was cheating but they [the opposition] just concluded that there was [one] cheating without any basis at all," he said.

Garcillano sounded like he wouldn't care less if he was being used to get at Ms Arroyo.

Advice to politicians

"If you're being as they are now going to destroy the President at all costs just because they want power. I hope you will tell them that. I hope they will not use the people as their tool to enhance their narrow, selfish interest."

He hoped that the politicians would put the nation's interest above politics.

"They are holding high positions, they are big people. All the more that they should think of the welfare of those [within] their jurisdiction."

Garcillano declined earlier to have his lawyers talk to Ms Arroyo and a host of opposition leaders but those did not remove pending cases.

Nothing to hide

"In fact, I issued a statement last election that the most powerful [tool to bring] supervision by this country was the last election because there [has] been, we have done already."

He said he had "nothing to hide," for was treated as a "victim" in this political mix.

"To be very frank with you, I'm not accepting that there were such [anomalies]. Information, between me and the President. Whose sources are who cooked allegedly? It's mine and the President's? Who is the victim in this wiretapping? It's me. That's why do they have to subject me to really [to] something which does not exist?"

Where's original tape?

Garcillano said he had no qualms about going to Congress, but that before he could be asked about the specifics of the disputed taped conversations, "they have to show me that there was such an original [master] tape, if such indeed existed."

He described the tape as "edited, tampered, edited as contested" and "tailored to fit their sinister purpose."

"What I'm telling you now are the most harrowings during the last election. There was no irregularity."

He doubted the authenticity of the audio tapes that had been aired in public.

"I can't be certain that it was my voice. There are people who can imitate someone else's voice."

Asserting that the tapes' contents were true, he pointed out there was no showing that he and Ms Arroyo had talked about rigging the elections.

GMA asking

Assuming that we talked, remember that the controversial topic which we are now trying to answer was tapped on May 24.... Another subject of the conversation was the lowering of the advantage of the President over her opponent.

"She was asking why her lead decreased to 890,000 when two, three days before that, [her] advantage ... over FPJ (Fernando Poe Jr.) was more than one million already."

Garcillano denied ever saying, "just pressure (I will increase it)" or "just [make] (I will let)," adding:

"That should be emphasized because the subject of the conversation was no longer [the 2004] election. She was only concerned [about] the reduction of her advantage over her opponent. The canvassing [in the provincial level was over]. In fact, not in the Cotabato knew very well that the results of the elections [had already been submitted] to Congress. All the certificates of canvass were already in the future, except those places where there were special elections such as Lanao."

Threats on life

But refought with, he said the alleged tapping of his conversations had started nine days after the elections when all the results from the provinces had already been submitted to Congress.

"There were officials beyond the reach of anybody," he said.

In a written statement he gave to the Inquirer, Garcillano also denied allegations made by former Maguindanao election supervisor Lintang Bedol that he was in the Ayoyao's La Vista residence when money was allegedly distributed to election officers.

He also denied claims that he had boasted of receiving bundles of money for his election "operations."

Garcillano said threats on his life forced him to disappear.

"That's the primary reason why I had to keep myself away from the public eye. Which as I would have liked to come out as early as about a month after this thing [began]. I have the feeling that somebody might be interested in the answers that I will give. And if they don't like it, there are surely dry life and that of my wife are in danger."

Although there were no "specific threats," some text messages "were intimidating and there were calls which I did not like."

Garcillano said he hadn't spoken with Ms Arroyo since he were since hiding. "Until now, I have not spoken to her."

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Children enjoy veggie servings from giant salad

From page A1

of course, lettuce, tomatoes, onions and bellpepper.

A woman and her three grandchildren, aged between 8 and 10, quickly consumed two bowls each. A bowl cost P20.

Organizers earlier announced that this year's harvest would try to break the record by feeding 50,000 people. But only 18,000 servings had been offered to the public as of 7 p.m.

Caesar's Salad

Baliuag's first salad was a giant Caesar's Salad in 2001. It fed 5,000 people, beating the record held by a Utah community in the United States.

The second fed 12,000 people and the third 20,000, according to Ocampo.

Last year, Baliuag's fourth outing drew only 9,000 people because it was limited weeks after the city recorded cases of the bacterial disease meningococcitis, and threads in Alhambra, city tourism officials.

Alhambra said Baliuag was interested in promoting nutrition through its salad festivals.

Nutrition Chief Orlino Hernandez said the festival aimed to use farming as one effective, affordable salads in their menus to counteract the economic and nutritional value of vegetables that are usually available next door," Alhambra said.

La Trinidad

The vegetable-producing towns of La Trinidad and Baguio in Benguet are next. Baguio, La Trinidad, a 10-minute drive from the city, serves as the region's vegetable trading post. Vegetables traded in La Trinidad are supplied to markets in Metro Manila daily.

But nutrition advocates have found that children living in or near the vegetable-producing towns do not necessarily enjoy eating vegetables.

"We may have helped market the vegetables to children with our farming it," Beltran said.

He said Baliuag's salad festivals were a combination of party and gastronomic delight.

Rock and pop concerts, celebrities and relatively cheap salad meals at the convention drew crowds from Baguio, La Trinidad, Pangasinan and Metro Manila.

Likewise crush-climbing facility yesterday were as long as the lines for the salad bars because each P200 plate sold to the festival entitled the bearer to climb a small coarse outside the convention hall and to unpack down.

Children were first in line.

SEA OF GREENS. A chef does his part in preparing the giant tossed salad at the food-eating festival held yearly at the Baguio Convention Center in Baguio City.

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S'pore . . .

From page A1

ago and said I don't want to hang Nguyen and that I don't have to work anymore," chief executioner Darshan Singh said on Sunday.

"I think the [the prison authorities] must be mad after seeing my picture in the newspapers," Singh said.

Australia's Sunday Telegraph said a new executioner was expected to be flown to Singapore this week to carry out the June 2 hanging of 25-year-old Nguyen Tuong Van, who was sentenced to death for carrying 400 grams of heroin while in transit at the island nation's airport.

Singh, a 74-year-old ethnic Indian, was reported in the Australian media to have confessed more than 400 hangings in his 30-year career. The reports said Singh had wanted to retire, but the search for a replacement was unsuccessful.

Singapore's prison department could not be reached for comment.

26,000 clones

Despite repeated pleas from Australia to reconsider clemency for the former salesman, Singapore has stood firm on its decision, saying that Nguyen was caught with enough heroin to "kill 26,000 people" and that the government would not allow his appeal to be used as a vehicle for illicit drugs.

Australian Prime Minister John Howard has warned Singapore to prepare for lingering resentment in Canberra if it goes ahead with the execution of Nguyen, but Howard has rejected public calls in Australia for boycotts of Singaporean companies and trade sanctions with one of its closest Asian allies.

Howard made an other personal appeal to Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Malta on Saturday, Australian media reported on Sunday. Reuters

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MMDA to implement OBR scheme even on Sundays

By Tarra V. Quismundo

BEGINNING THIS SUNDAY, THE METROpolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) would implement the Organized Bus Route (OBR) scheme seven days a week in anticipation of the holiday rush.

"We finally have to control the number of buses even on Sundays, because what happens is there is still long queuing. We don't know how many buses would come out," said Angelito Vergel de Dios, MMDA Traffic Operations Center executive director.

A traffic reduction scheme, the OBR took effect on Edsa last December, placing roughly 2,500 registered buses under a controlled dispatch scheme pegged on commuter demand at a given time.

The scheme, first conceived in 2005, aimed to maximize the per trip loading capacity of buses, a feat that had proved impossible under a free-for-all dispatch.

It also doubled as the agency's effort to change drivers' habit on color-coded lanes that Fombon-supported Metro Manila's major road artery which had teemed with half empty buses before the OBR took flight.

The agency, however, decided to lift the OBR on Sundays as, only a few hours ply Edsa on what is usually a slow commuting day.

MMDA Metropolitan Road Rules Enforcement System head Alan Santiago, who is in charge of the OBR operations, had said in a previous interview that the agency was also considering implementing the scheme seven days a week with the expected increase in passenger volume during the holiday season.

"That's also part of it because we expect that there would be more commuters on the road, and we are already seeing that increase," Vergel de Dios said.

Buses plying Edsa pass through several shopping districts and malls, including commercial centers in Pasay City, Makati, Ortigas Center in Pasig, the Araneta Center in Cubao, another metro commercial areas of Alabang and Bacoor, and Caloocan's Monumento area.

POPULAR DUO IN TOWN

British pop stars Peter Asher and Gordon Waller, more popularly known as Peter and Gordon, arrived yesterday at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport for a concert on Dec. 1 at the Araneta Coliseum. The duo became known in the '60s for their songs "World without love" and "I go to pieces."

Tumana Bridge almost done; Feb. opening likely

By Leila B. Salaverria

THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS AND Highways has begun the last phase of construction on the Tumana Bridge which would provide a faster alternative route between Marikina and Quezon City.

The final phase of the project, which consists of erecting the bridge railings and building the drainage systems and bridge approaches, is already more than 13 percent complete, just slightly ahead of the expected accomplishment rating.

The Tumana Bridge is expected to be finished in February, according to DPWH Region 4-A Capital Region Director Babes Lalu.

The project's contractor is the EEI Corporation Specialist Corporation.

According to Lalu, the Tumana Bridge (left) would span the Marikina River would enable motorists coming from Quezon City to Marikina, San Mateo and the northeastern areas of Rizal and vice versa.

Without the bridge, motorists going to and from the said cities would have to take a longer route through the Marcos Highway or Sumulong diversion.

The opening of the bridge would also make crossing the Marikina River safer for motorists because they would not have to pass through the Tumana spillway anymore, the DPWH official added.

A spillway is a channel or passageway through which excess water is diverted.

While the spillway also provides a shortcut for motorists, it is dangerous to use when there are heavy rains, said Lalu. In August, an FX taxi driver drowned after his vehicle was swept into the river when he tried to drive it over the submerged spillway.

Still no change in Wycoco's condition, doctors report

By Margaux C. Ortiz

NATIONAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION (NBI) Director Reynaldo Wycoco is "still hanging on and fighting for his life" on his 58th day of confinement at the Manila Doctors Hospital Intensive Care Unit.

Supt. Kilpe Wycoco, chief of the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group-Bicutan Detachment and NBI director's younger brother, yesterday said the doctors told him that there has been no significant change in his condition.

"We are still hopeful that he will get through this," the younger Wycoco said, adding that the NBI chief's digestive system "has also been working."

His doctors have yet to release another medical bulletin on his condition.

Dr. Irene Morales, the attending physician and MDH medical director, said Wycoco's blood pressure and heart rate were unstable on Friday morning. As a result, they had to postpone plans to conduct a CT scan and electroencephalogram to check the condition of his brain.

Morales had earlier explained that the blood vessel leading to Wycoco's brain was blocked, causing the stroke.

She added that the NBI director's assessment was categorical and that "parts of his brain for breathing and circulation were the most affected because of the obstructive bleeding."

The NBI chief had just ended a near-restrictive visit when he suddenly slumped and collapsed and slipped into a deep coma.

MetroBriefs

QC to pick gender-friendly film

Quezon City is once again answering its cry for more gender-friendly films of the year among the entries to the Cinemalaya Philippine Independent Film Festival (CINEMA). The city hands out the annual special award to the film "that best portrays and promotes gender issues and issues at the center of the evolving women and men relationship together toward development." This is the third time that the city will be giving out the "Most Gender-Sensitive Film" award. The winner will be announced during the MMFF awards night in December. Mayor Sonny Belmonte, in a statement, said the award is in line with the city's thrust of "empowering women and children, persons with disabilities, senior citizens, gender tolerance and the like." The city council of Quezon City, through Belmonte, has already been formed but their names have yet to be announced, according to the QC public affairs and information service office. The MMFF has its own panel of judges. Last year, the award went to "Kubrador Queen," a film depicting amenities committed during World War II. The film starred Judy Ann Santos, Raymond Santiago and Bonnie Vida, and was directed by Joel Lamangan for Regal Films. QuezCon City's Gender and Development Code provides for the recognition of films that consistently seek to question gender issues in society. **BJ Tito**

Avoid substandard Christmas lights, decor

Spending on firecrackers or decorations for the holidays? Be careful. Just as the coming Christmas season is known for merry, it is also a time for revelers to be extra cautious. Pasig City fire Marshal Rizal de Pantoja warned that firecrackers and substandard Christmas lights increase the risks of fire on the public should take precautions to ensure their safety. De Pantoja advised residents to be cautious in buying Christmas lights. "Residents should avoid buying substandard lights and firecrackers. They should look for quality seals from the Department of Trade and Industry in the decors they are buying," he said. Buhering fire crackers, on the other hand, could trigger fires, especially if the sparks accidentally fall on flammable materials such as dried leaves. Those in urban areas are vulnerable. If fire hazards are built close to each other, the fire could spread rapidly. Pantoja asked community leaders to regulate the use of firecrackers and designate areas where residents could light up pyrotechnics. Firefighters would also be deployed to these areas, he added. Pantoja commended people who would be starting their fireworks displays ahead during the holidays to lessen the chances of fire incidents as the firing for crackers would not be allowed yet in December 2009. Pasig City was hit by three small fires triggered by firecrackers, City Fire Investigation Chief Rolando Santillano said. **Edson C. Catalan Jr.**

Indian trader arrested

Bureau of Investigation (NBI) agents arrested last week an Indian businessman who had issued seven rubber checks to another Indian trader. Jeremy Chandumal was arrested in a 673 Apt in Cebu on City last Monday. NBI Special Task Force Director Reynaldo Lumagbas said there was a warrant for Chandumal's arrest after he failed to pay P256,785 to Vishnumal Manghirmal. The money was for the garments the suspect bought from Manghirmal in 1996. Chandumal had issued the bounced checks for the amount but the bank did not honor the checks. **Margaux C. Ortiz**

Manila Water

12-hour water interruption in Mandaluyong, Manila and Makati due to water improvement project

The interconnection of a segment of the ongoing major pipe replacement project called A. Rita Line will cause a temporary water service interruption in portions of Mandaluyong, Manila and Makati from **8:00 p.m., Tuesday, November 29, 2009 up to 8:00 a.m., Wednesday, November 30, 2009.** The activity is part of Manila Water's aggressive water improvement program.

The following areas will experience low water pressure to no water:

Mandaluyong: Brgy. Mabini-J. Rizal, Vergara, Namayan

Manila: Brgy. 892 to 905, Punta, Sta. Ana, Manila and Sta. Ana District, San Andres, Manila

Makati: Brgy. Carmona, Kasilawan, Tejeros, Singkamas, La Paz, San Antonio, Sta. Cruz.

Residents are advised to store enough water prior to the schedule of the water interruptions.

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Well-honed boxers hope to duplicate '91 title romp

BACOLOD CITY—ARMED FEARS OF BIASED officiating, the 22nd Southeast Asian Games boxing tournament gets going today at the University of St. La Salle Coliseum here.

Launched with international exposure, the Philippine boxing team yesterday declared its confidence to maintain its lofty status as Southeast Asia's best boxers defending champion Thailand.

Amateur Boxing Association of the Philippines president Manny Lopez expressed confidence that the RP camp can duplicate their victory during the 1991 SEA Games in Manila, where the Philippines won eight gold medals.

"They're in good shape. Magenda ang mood nang bawat isa at handa nang sumabak sa laban. (They're in a good fighting mood and ready to go)," Lopez said.

Seventeen gold medals are at stake this time, nine of them in the women's division.

The first round pairings have yet to be determined pending the draw and the final weight-in at 8 this morning at the USLL Coliseum. Action starts with the welterweight competition at 10 a.m.

Thailand women's boxing coach Boonsom Soontharee had earlier expressed concern that the judging might go the Philippines' way, but Lopez allayed fears of biased officiating Saturday night. *Gerald Flores, PDI Visayas Bureau*

Filipino wushu bets out to dethrone Viets

THE PHILIPPINE WUSHU TEAM SETS SIEGE on heartbreak in the Vietnam Southeast Asian Games in 2003 as it gets for the sport's overall crown starting today until Wednesday at the Strike Aguinaldo College Sports and Cultural Center in Manila.

Lester Pimentel, the RP team captain who won a gold medal in the 1995 SEA edition in Chiang Mai, Thailand, said they are ready to dethrone the hometown team.

With a squad spearheaded by Pimentel and former world champion Arvin Ting, Bethel Ong, Willy Wang in the taolu (form) competition and Sidharta Hidayang, Jeddy Andres and Rose Cristian in sanshou (combat), the RP team will try to sweep the latter to reigning titles and perennial rival Vietnam.

Noniel Andalecio, after medalists in the national championship, to the team's new coaches.

"We have the advantage this year because of the returning world champions, and familiarity with the venue," said Pimentel.

Twenty-one gold medals are at stake in wushu—the fifth biggest in terms of gold medals—with the Philippines the 4C sports in the SEAG calendar. Vietnam ruled wushu for years ago with 11 golds. *Herman Tiñoso*

TODAY'S SCHEDULE

THE NATIONAL flag is borne by hundreds of students during yesterday's opening ceremonies at the Quirino Grandstand

Riot of colors, dance, music ushers in SEAG

TAEKWONDO Olympian Maria Antonieta Rivera lights the SEAG flame.

PRESIDENT Macapagal-Arroyo declares the Games open in brief remarks.

Tor

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Thai nip M reach

Do or die

Big dance sweep; karate debacl

res captures gold on last jump

ames records fall

VICTORY'S Bui Thi Nhung clears the bar at a record 1.89 meters.

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P800-M call center building to rise in Mall of Asia

HENRY SY

By Elizabeth L. Sanchez

THE SM GROUP OF MALL TYCOON Henry Sy Sr. is spending P800 million to put up a 32-story building for the burgeoning call center industry at its massive 60-ha mall complex along Roxas Boulevard.

SM Investments Corp. finance chief Jose Ibo said the building would specifically be designed for call center companies that have been looking at the Philippines for their expansion.

"The rental rates will be lower than Makati rates," Ibo said. He estimates that the cost per square metre in the new building would be roughly P15,000.

The Philippine call center unit of Dell Inc., the world's biggest manufacturer of personal computers, will be in the Mall of Asia complex. Dell will initially lease 13,000 square metres, but it is not clear if the computer giant would locate to the new call center building, which will have a total floor area of 100,000 square metres.

Dell's Philippine call center, its second in Asia, will handle calls from the company's customers in the United States and will hire 700 people.

This may help boost customer traffic in the Mall of Asia, the most ambitious project of SM Prime Holdings Inc., the country's biggest shopping mall operator.

SM Prime is set to open the Mall of Asia, which sits on a 60-hectare property overlooking Manila Bay, by February next year.

The mall is designed to become not just the Philippines' biggest, but also the most complete and innovative shopping complex.

Banks' bad loans at ₱170.6B

End-Sept. level equivalent to 9.4% of total loans

By Doris C. Dumlao

THE NON-PERFORMING LOANS OF COMMERcial banks stood at P170.62 billion in end-September, or 9.43 percent of their total loan portfolio, the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas said.

Although slightly higher than the 9.4 percent a month ago, the BSP noted that this was a substantial improvement from the 15.87 percent 80% ratio in September 2004.

The banking system's NPL ratio eased to a single-digit level after seven years as the special purpose vehicle (SPV) laws allowed the unloading of P95 billion in bad assets since last year.

The NPL ratio peaked at 16.01 percent in October 2001 but started to ease sharply starting last year as banks scrambled to avail themselves of the SPV incentives, which expired last April.

The SPV Law granted the documentary stamp tax, the capital gains tax and, the expanded VAT on asset transfers and donation ordered the registration and transfer fees by 50 percent.

The slight increase in the NPL ratio was due to a 2.5 percent contraction in total loan portfolio that surpassed the 1.6 percent reduction in NPLs from a month ago.

Six of nine bank banks, the NPL ratio also went up to 11.26

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Lorenzo's gravy
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STOCK MARKET

Banks seen to continue rally

THE PSE'S BENCHMARK INDEX, THE STOCK market is expected to continue its uptrend on prospects for lower interest rates and a stronger peso.

Jojo Gonzales, president of Philippine Equity Partners Inc., said the Bangko Sentral's improved outlook on inflation was expected to ease pressure on interest rates. Lower interest rates mean costs for companies that borrow money for expansion.

Bangko Sentral governor Amando Tetangco Jr. said on Friday consumer prices were expected to slowly fall to 6.8 percent next year in December, below last month's 7 percent, due to lower prices of crude and rice like food prices.

The National Statistics Office is scheduled to release the consumer price index (CPI) data for November on Dec. 6.

The recent decline in oil prices has triggered a lower inflation forecast by the BSP for 2006 to 7.0 to 8.0 percent from 8.0 to 9.0 percent.

Gonzales also said the peso's strength was trending countries especially market investors.

Investors are also expected to keep up chance of new companies that will be included in the Philippine Stock Exchange composite index.

Among these are two companies of real magnate Henry Sy Sr.'s Ortigas and SM In-

Banks investing more FCDUs in T-bills, bonds, BSP says

By Doris C. Dumlao

LOCAL BANKS ARE INVESTING more of their foreign currency deposit units in marketable securities, such as treasury bills and dollar-denominated bonds, according to the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas.

BSP data showed that FCDUs invested in marketable securities jumped to 22.6 percent of total assets at the end of June this year from 11.7 percent in the same period last year.

On the other hand, the share of investments held to maturity declined to 22.0 percent from 33.3 percent during the same period, due to new regulations issued by the BSP which made it more expensive for banks to account these two easily tradable accounts.

"Investments were likewise preferred over loans as indicated by the decrease in the share of total loan portfolio (including inter-bank loans) to total assets (i.e. to 30.7 percent from 35.8 percent during the same period last year)," the BSP reported.

Total assets held by the FCDU system hit an all-time high of $21.22 billion at mid-June, 11 percent more than the year-ago level.

About 96.7 percent of these assets was held by commercial banks, and the balance was held by thrift banks.

The bulk of these assets worth $16.47 billion represented net investments or against a net loan portfolio of only $5.4 billion.

The major beneficiaries of the FCDU system's lending activities were manufacturing (36.7 percent), utilities (17.8 percent) and transportation, storage and communication (7.8 percent).

Prior to the 1997 crisis, banks aggressively lent in foreign currencies, particularly to real estate companies, encouraged by the stable exchange rate and the lack of reserve requirement on FCDU deposits.

When the currency ran bit, many companies that were saddled with heavy dollar debts had to seek a restructuring or even court-assisted rehabilitation.

Foreign currency loan demand also dumped due to the protracted impact of the same crisis, prompting banks to invest in higher-yielding marketable securities and extend to each other.

Keeping up with the neighbors

I WAS IN INDONESIA AND TO BE ALSO LAST week, and as always, came out feeling depressed and jealous.

In Indonesia, I cannot but the entire road to Bogor, some 60 kilometers out of the capital, was 6 to 8 lanes expressway.

Some of our expressways in the country pretty-dust ha.

My daily trip to work (from my home in Las Piñas, 30 km out of Magallanes, still counts as some 12 km of a congested two-way "highway."

The stretch, which is just about a fifth of the way already takes up about half the travel time.

Later in the week, still in Indonesia, I also found myself passing two supermarkets that actually swayed each other—something unheard of (most recently).

We still boast a slightly higher average income than our Southern neighbor, and we are now clearly lag well behind if not sad infrastructure.

Out of the league

Flying on host to Thailand, the vast multitude of arriving tourists had to wait in line at the immigration counters for about an hour—and one had arrived at midnight!

I could only shake my head in jealousy as I saw for myself how far our latest fallen behind this other neighbor of ours in attracting tourists. Bangkok also now boasts a subway system, in addition to its impressive "Skytrain" MRT that puts our own LRT/MRT system to shame by its superior efficiency.

And I remembered how way back in 1992, I and a couple of colleagues had gone on a study tour of some Thai villages, passing through boons and hours of expressways, a large part of it elevated.

Forget about Singapore and Malaysia; they are now out of our league. A visit to these neighbors of ours invariably leaves any Filipino with the same depressed and jealous feeling because of the glaring disparity, which is immediately apparent the moment you step out of the plane and into their impressive airport terminals.

Three things wrong

What is wrong with Philippine infrastructure? To my mind, there are three things wrong: One, we simply don't have enough of them; two, they are not integrated and were designed, and three, they are improperly distributed.

Why don't we have enough infrastructure? To begin with, our government doesn't have enough money for it. Too many taxpayers claim no their taxes, and too many people in government keep for themselves whatever taxpayers decide to shell out.

This cost me can all blame on ourselves, and we all need to make fundamental changes in ourselves to get out of it.

Second, too much of our budget simply goes to repair and maintenance of calamity-damaged infrastructure you after year.

This problem is somewhat unique to us, as most of our more progressive neighbors has to contend with the number of typhoons and floods we have to face every year. There is little we can do about this one, it is one of our misfortunes as a nation.

Third, much of our infrastructure is below standard [illegible] why they are so easily damaged and have to be repaired and so forth on effect because too many people want to make money out of every contract you put.

No coherence

It's bad enough that we don't have enough infrastructure. We also cannot get the most out of what little we have because they are not well integrated and coordinated.

In the 1990s, we began putting together the blueprint of a seamless multi-modal transport system for the country, so that one can easily move from, say, rail transport to air or water transport by running that the various modes of transport connect to one another.

It's a shame that we even our existing mass rail transit line in Metro Manila cannot to one another seamlessly. And it will makes many people wonder why we cannot build another several hundred meters of railway that could have connected our airports to the LRT line.

Unfortunately, the integrated multi-modal system we envisaged then apparently remains largely a blueprint to this day.

The third problem is that our infrastructure is not properly distributed, whether on grounds of efficiency or equity.

For obvious reasons, the lion's share of our infrastructure budget goes to Metro Manila projects, something our Mindanao friends have always loudly complained about.

We did make a conscious effort in the 90s to devote a growing share of the infrastructure budget to Mindanao, which resulted in a more than doubling of the share between the start and end of the Ramos administration. But the effort evidently is in the way to the same allocation is too often determined by political considerations—thanks to the pork barrel and the "congressional initiatives" system—rather than the objective criteria that our planners painstakingly develop and attempt, unsuccessfully, to apply.

Private sector participation

So what's one way out of this predicament? Paying our taxes faithfully is a good place to start.

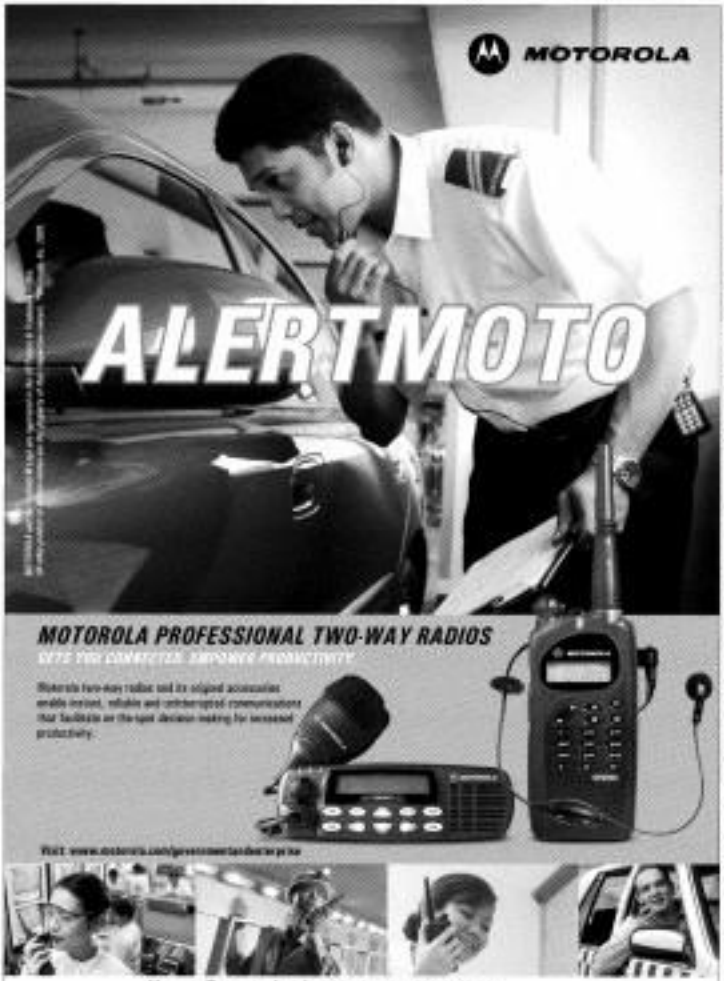
Money of those who benefit most from our various forms of infrastructure are probably among the biggest evaders of taxes as well.

Until we are able to dramatically improve on our tax compliance and collection, we must look for to to continue tapping private sector resources to provide much of our needed infrastructure via the Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) scheme and its variants.

But we also need to recognize that the cost of infrastructure has to be recovered if can't be [illegible] (i.e. through the proper tolls and fees), if we cannot get it from the general taxpayers.

And yet some of the biggest complainers on highway tolls are those who have been getting much more than their money's worth from their taxes.

Good infrastructure comes at a cost. Yet an office illustration that doesn't so-rush thing as a free lunch. Comments are welcome at chalitos@skynet.net.



PAL to stay under SEC supervision

By Clarissa S. Batino

PHILIPPINE AIRLINES (PAL) DECIDED TO complete its 10-year debt rehabilitation program ending in 2009 as the aviation industry remains battered by uncertainties such as high fuel prices and slumping volume caused by the bird flu scare.

PAL president Jaime Bautista said the flag carrier recently met officials of the Securities and Exchange Commission to discuss whether or not the company would like to get out of SEC supervision.

Last year, PAL announced that the 10-year rehabilitation period in some of the terms of the program were surviving its expiration plan.

"We are completing our 10-year rehab. For the meantime, we have also decided to stay within the SEC jurisdiction," Bautista said in an interview.

The SEC supervision, he clarified, was different from the rehabilitation.

The country's biggest airline had asked creditors a couple of years ago to restructure its loans and extend the maturity by three years. Bautista said not all lenders have agreed to the extension.

He said PAL shareholders had no choice but to stay under SEC protection for now.

PAL, Asia's oldest airline, was forced to go into rehabilitation in 1999 following crippling labor problems and its failure to settle debts totaling $2.2 billion. The rehabilitation called for a $200 million fresh equity provided by its owner Lucio Tan.

Like any company under rehabilitation, the flag carrier is barred from incurring new loans and every material decision like the purchase of new airplanes or flying to new routes had to be approved by creditors.

The US Export Import Bank and a group of European export credit agencies account for nearly two-thirds of PAL's $2.2-billion debt. About $400 million is owed to local banks.

Of the total debt, PAL managed to reduce its obligations to about $1 billion. Bautista said the airline had been paying debts as they fell due.

The flag carrier reported a $4.5-million net loss in the second quarter (July to September 2004) of its fiscal year ending March 2005. In the first quarter (April to June 2004), it registered a net income of $27.3 million. With the second quarter losses, PAL's first half earnings stood at $22 million.

Despite the second quarter losses, PAL's first half performance already surpassed its full-year net profit of P1.23 billion from April 2004 to March 2005.

The SEC had allowed PAL to prepare its financial statement in US dollars given that more than 70 percent of the flag carrier's revenues are denominated in foreign currencies due to its thriving overseas operations.

Bautista said he was worried that PAL's profitability was still threatened by expensive jet fuel even if oil prices had eased slightly.

On top of that, he said, September, October and November were lean months for travel.

"There are so many uncertainties. It is best if we finish the rehab and stay within SEC's monitoring," he noted.

Banks ...

From page B1

percent from 11.16 percent in August.

Meanwhile, the ratio of restructured loans to total loans rose to 5.95 percent from the previous month's 3.92 percent as the reduction in total loans offset the 1.7 percent reduction in restructured loans. But, non-performing restructured loans fell to 45.93 percent as a ratio of total restructured loans or 3.8 percentage points better than a month ago.

The ratio of real and other properties owned or acquired (repos) to gross assets moved up to 3.07 percent from the previous month's 3.02 percent as the 1.5-percent contraction in gross assets overshadowed the 8.3-percent reduction in gross repos.

With rising foreclosures, the industry's non-performing assets also went up as a ratio of total assets to 8.39 percent from 9.16 percent. Total NPAs amounted to P363.75 billion from P365.94 billion a month ago.

Bankers are lobbying in Congress to revise the SIV Law to speed up the sale of the remaining bad assets. If this happens, the BSP expects the banking system to unload another P9.08 billion in bad assets, trimming the bad loan ratio to about 7.5 percent.

Stocks ...

From page B1

southwestern Corp. 3, trade-led utility firm Manila Water Co., luxury subsidiary Philippine Telephone Corp., and Phelps Mining Corp.

Grace Cordovia of 2TradeAsia.com said the Phisix might trade within a narrow range between 2,000 and 2,100 this week.

"Second-tier stocks tied to prospects within property and finance might take centre stage, specifically those involved in construction and office management," she said.

Last week, the Phisix rose 26.1 points or 1.25 percent, with mining issues taking centre stage due to the rise in gold and copper prices. The mining index gained 3.3 percent last week.

"What makes the recent trend spectacular for gold watchers is the fact that the gold price rally in the last five months came at the same time the dollar continued to strengthen against world currencies," All-Capital Securities wrote.

Cordovia said stable interest rates, latter movement in crude futures prices and an appreciating peso would help support the economy and, in turn, prod up interest in the stock market.

Elizabeth G. Sanchez

Lorenzo's gravy

COCKTALES

Victor C. Aganón

Son of and named after the former controversial tycoon, Gregorio Ongpin's Forbes fortune is now worth nearly P40 million.

The younger (and some say, the better) Ongpin, the Lorenzo another Filipino member who isn't, also just turned 40 this year.

Lopezes deconsolidated

RED HOT gold is now close to touching $500 an ounce, and the country's biggest gold producer, Lepanto Consolidated, should be sharing in the windfall, right?

Wrong.

Lepanto even expects to lose P1.16 billion this year, because somebody in the company made the wrong hedging bet.

The year's loss, expected to reach P640 million in all, is on top of the $16 million (more than P1.1 billion) dollar-to-market loss the mining emitter incurred, because the forward gold contracts it had forged before the commodity boom were pegged at $295 an ounce.

By mid-2004, gold was already selling at $417, apiz. The number even the normally unflappable Lopezes discover, TV talk show host Ricardo "Boy" Puno, Jr., has lately been heard grumbling over Lopezes's governance.

Lopezes's stock has been languishing in the 22-centavo level, half the second 2004 value when a secretive shareholder pocketed 97.2 billion after 10bp Securities stunned a 2-bib percent block for P6.4bib/share.

After investigation, the Securities and Exchange Commission later ruled that it had found no evidence of insider dealing against certain company officials.

Money go-round

■ NORTHWEST will trolling under bombs-spicy promotion, is determined to sell every available seat out of Manila this Yuletide season.

In latest gimmick: Buy one, take-out economy fare to Hawaii and the West Coast for $1,068, effectively $5.00 per person. Ticket valid for Dec. 1-31 departure.

■ AIRAC is flying in its Asia Pacific chair, Vincent Cheng, and CAB talk show host Lorraine Kuhn, to celebrate the fund's US$1 billion in the country to reserves at the Makati Shangri-La.

Heard through the grapevine

DEL MONTE Philippines chair Martin Lorenzo puts the family's chance of blushing the Fine Pacific takeover of the Singapore-listed food tool joint conglomerate at "50-50." "No matter what the outcome of the Del Monte transaction, I still have the utmost respect for [Fine Pacific CEO] Manuel V. Pangilinan ... and I look forward to working with him in the future should an opportunity arise," he said.

(Email: ambalon_pal@pldtdsl.net or cocktales_pal@yahoo.com)

RAPU RAPU POLYMETALLIC PLANT

Firm sinks in ₱300M for mine repair

KILL ARTHRITIS IN 5 MINUTES
FAR EAST MEDICAL EQUIPMENT

By Christine A. Saplacan

LAFAYETTE PHILIPPINES INC. HAS sunk in more than P300 million more to improve the operations of its Rapu Rapu Polymetallic plant in Legazpi, Albay.

The repair of a waste dump will reconcentrate the zinc-lead ores dumped up, said Rod Watt, Lafayette Philippines director and country manager.

Watt on Friday said that the mining firm would not resume operations until its facilities have been thoroughly checked and repaired.

"We would not want an upward moment to happen again," Watt said in an interview. "We would want the approval of the government, through the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, before we proceed with our mining activities."

According to the DENR's Environmental Management Bureau, the mine spills from Lafayette's tailings pond took place because the mining firm could not contain the rainwater that seeped through, causing the pond to overflow. Watt admitted that the company had been penalized over the incident.

But he said that the company will fully support, and comply with, the recommendations of the authorities.

Watt said Lafayette on its own constituted the services of another independent investigating team a week ago.

The team, composed of eight mining engineers and geological engineers, assessed the mining infrastructure of Rapu Rapu.

The company will spend part of of its allocated $6 million, or P326 million, budget to improve the waste dump pond, he said. Lafayette Philippines has programmed $30 million in capital expenditures.

The company's shareholders based in Australia have been concerned with the incident "but the commitment is to invest continues."

The Rapu Rapu Polymetallic Project, owned by Lafayette, is one of the first mining projects to be approved by government. The plant went into commercial production early this year.

The operator of the Rapu Rapu mines shifted to metal ore production, after producing 5,000 ounces of gold. Watt said the firm hopes to resume operations in December.

Pulse Asia survey pure hogwash

QUESTIONS OF POLICIES

Ernesto C. Gerochi

PULSE ASIA'S OCTOber 2005 Ulat ng Bayan survey released November 22 a pure, unadulterated hogwash.

The press release reports "Pulse Asia is pleased to share with you some findings ... on Most Beneficial and Most Harmful Developments for the Period." Most Person to hold the Philippines is Present.

"In the interest of disseminating information relating to Filipino perceptions, opinions, assessments, and attitudes relating to current developments here and abroad, we request you to assist us in helping inform the public."

God's sakes. The rest of the press release says:

"Majority of Filipinos favor the President's resignation. Nearly six in ten Filipinos (58 percent) express preference for different exit scenarios than would favor the President resigning from public office. The overall figure is broken down as follows: 37 percent say it would be most beneficial for Filipinos if the President resigns followed by a presidential election; 12 percent favor the President's resignation and eventual replacement by Vice President Noli de Castro; 11 percent prefer the President's resignation and replacement by a temporary "junta" that would pave the way for the election of a new president or prime minister; 11 percent say Filipinos would most benefit from the resignation of both the President and Vice President, with Senate President Drilon temporarily taking over while preparations are made for special elections; and, only 6 percent consider it most beneficial if the President resigns, with Vice President de Castro taking over, while preparations are also made for a new government under a new charter. Anywhere from 40 percent of those in the Visayas to 64 percent of Metro Manilans are of the opinion that the scenario most beneficial to Filipinos is for the President to resign."

Pulse Asia claims the nationwide field survey is "based on a multistage probability sample of 1,200 representative adults 18 years and above", or 300 in each of the areas of Metro Manila, rest of Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao. Face-to-face interviews were supposedly conducted from October 15 to 27.

Social Weather Stations used the same format in their third quarter survey. In my columns of 16 September and 17 October, I tagged the SWS survey as hogwash.

So is this Pulse Asia survey.

How can Pulse Asia claim to have conducted a nationwide survey? Nine hundred inservices in the provinces do not even come up to one interview in each of the 1,626 municipalities (not counting 117 cities).

The validity of a survey is based on the long-held premise that you do not have to take a whole bowlful to determine how a soup tastes. A teaspoonful will do. But the Pulse Asia survey, just like the SWS survey, is not even a tiny dropful soup.

How then can Pulse Asia claim that the survey results on 1,200 respondents are the opinion of the majority of Filipinos? Even if we handicap-favor in favor of Pulse Asia, and assume that the adult population accounts for half of the total population, 1,200 respondents is minuscule compared to 42 million adults nationwide. That's one interview for every 35,000 adults. That is not even a tiny drop of soup.

Pulse Asia claims "most [or exact 58] Filipinos [58 percent] favor the President's resignation".

How can Pulse Asia claim that the opinion of 696 [1,200 times 58 percent] Filipinos represents the opinion of the majority of the adult population?

And when you chop up the minuscule 1,200 into four layers, the results will be even more meaningless. The size of the parts is not always equal to the whole.

Pulse Asia claims to have conducted a field survey. It seemed Pulse Asia, like SWS, conducted a table survey instead. A field survey is when you dig out your data in the heat of the morning sun. A table survey is when you pull figures out of a hat, and shuffle them around on a table in the cool comfort of an air-conditioned room. A table survey is overnight malicious.

These hogwash surveys should be stopped. Maybe the best way is for media (including personal columnists like myself) to completely ignore them. Then, maybe, just maybe, Pulse Asia and the rest of the survey firms will go away.

P800-M . . .

From page B1

The 161,000-square-meter complex consists of four buildings linked by elevated walkways. These buildings will feature a wide array of stores and venues for dining, entertainment, leisure, arts and culture.

The main mall will include shopping and dining establishments, the food court, and the mall's first Olympic-size ice skating rink. The north parking building will also house the SM department store and half of the 5,000 parking spaces while the south parking building will have the SM Hypermarket and more dining areas.

The mall's newest attraction is the Entertainment Plaza, which will be bowling and lifestyle facilities. The building will house 20 theaters, including a Director's Club and the country's first IMAX theater.

SM Prime had said the decision to push back the schedule would not have any impact on the company's financial results for the year.

RP urged to upgrade facilities, standards for food export

'Traders hope to break into untapped EU market for food products'

By Raissa M. Dantiago

BUSINESS LEADERS are urging the government to upgrade food testing laboratories to complement the efforts of private firms to comply with the requirements of the European Union's (EU) food safety regulations.

According to Atty. Eugene Bañez, chair of the Philippine Business Council, food exporters, such as tuna producers, feel that the government needs to match the efforts of the firms in raising their capacity to meet the European Union's standards on food products.

The exporters believe that the government is not doing enough.

"Fishing firms are willing to do their share, but the government must be able to enhance the capability of the private sector," Bañez said.

The exporters said that the companies' efforts would be futile if, for instance, the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources lacked the appropriate facilities, like laboratories and ports, that would ensure the quality of export products.

Examples of such modern requirements are the good manufacturing practice (GMP) and hazard analysis critical control point (HACCP), which the European Union and the EU started implementing on fruit juices and seafood four years ago.

GMP refers to the sanitary facilities and operations of a food factory while HACCP is a tribunal on the safeness of a food product.

Exporters need to be GMP- and HACCP-accredited before their products can enter the US and EU markets.

Gov't takes steps to sell PSTC

By Michelle V. Ramos

THE GOVERNMENT is preparing for the sale of PNOC Shipping and Transport Corp. (PSTC).

PSTC has been placed on the government list, along with other assets in the private sector as part of the government's privatization agenda.

Already, the government is seeking for a financial advisor that will facilitate the the design, planning, preparation and implementation of the disposition of PSTC.

PSTC, established in 1979, is engaged in the business of shipping, tankering, lightering, barging, towing and transport shipment of goods, chemicals, petroleum and other products, as well as marine products.

It is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Philippine National Oil Co.

Target date

The privatization committee of the PSTC hopes that by Dec. 12, they will have gathered applications to pre-qualify to the bidding from interested investors.

The government has embarked on an aggressive privatization effort of state assets, along with power, mainly to increase revenue collection and place to fiscal house in order.

The Department of Finance, one of the lead agencies administering privatization efforts, had said that proceeds from the privatization of government assets would be used partly to finance infrastructure and development projects.

The government has a target of generating P1 billion in 2004 through the sale of state assets, on top of expected revenues from the privatization of assets in the power sector.

Budget woes

The national government's lingering budget woes has prompted it from funding vital infrastructure projects and providing basic services.

Currently, almost a third of the national government's budget goes to interest payments.

Only less than 10 percent goes to capital spending.

This year, the national government likewise set a target of generating P1.56 trillion from privatization.

Already, the government has exceeded its target following the sale of its shares in Philippine National Bank to the Lucio Tan group.

NTC sets frequency band for remote control gadgets

By Clarissa S. Santos

THE NATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS Commission last week issued a circular setting a standard frequency band for all remote control gadgets, including motor vehicles used by the Manila Electric Co.

The commission acted on the request of the Singapore government to have a unified 900 band for all remote control devices to ease production and facilitate easier sales in stores.

The NTC has already allocated the 900 band for the exclusive use of remote control devices in the country.

Singapore entered its request through the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

At first, the government had some reservations "when Singapore first brought up the matter before the board," said NTC chair Ronaldo Lu Ban.

But when the commissioners endorsed an inventory of the bands it had awarded, it saw that the 900 band was still free.

"So we issued a circular on who needs to allocate the band, in line with the proposal of Singapore," Lu Ban said in an interview.

Remote control devices, like those used on toys and motor readers, particularly those of Mitsubishi and some airlines, operate on similar frequency.

The NTC is the agency tasked to manage and allocate all radio frequencies within the country's airspace.

Growrich maintains integrity of virgin coco oil in capsules

THE MAKER OF A BRAND enough food supplement—virgin coconut oil (VCO) in capsule form—is still the only company that has met the strict standards of the Bureau of Food and Drugs (BFAD) in developing and producing the capsules.

Growrich Food Manufacturing Inc., which produces virgin coconut oil products in 500-mg capsules, said that at present, no other company holds a BFAD registration for manufacturing the capsules.

Growrich said that its capsules would not have been issued a BFAD certificate of public registration if their manufacturing process had been substandard.

Recently, the release of a fraudulent version of VCO pills in the market prompted the Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Agriculture and Fisheries Product Standards (BAFPS) to investigate and order the pullout of the company's counterfeit and substandard version.

The government agency said three more companies in the health branches of the flavored VCO product.

According to Dr. Ed Liñato of Growrich, the firm came up with the idea of putting VCO into capsules for busy consumers who have complained of difficulty in ingesting it.

Liñato said Growrich's preservation technology the VCO's integrity because it is protected from the elements. The products come in tinted packs.

BUSINESS

Negotiation period for IS property sale extended

Lone offer way below gov't asking price

By Michelle V Rivera

THE GOVERNMENT HAS EXTENDED until December the negotiation period for the sale of a Makati property that used to house the International School.

The decision was made after the government got only one offer when, after a failed bidding, the property was offered for a negotiated sale. The bid was way below the floor price.

Jose A.B. Bengzon III, head of the Privatization Management Office, said the lone bidder was Robinsons Land Corp. Its, however, declined to divulge PLC's offer.

Bengzon said the PMO opted to extend the offer and negotiation period since two more entities had expressed interest to bid.

He said SLC, likewise, proposed the extension as it would improve its offer.

Aside from Robinsons Land Corp., Ayala Land Inc. earlier expressed interest to bid for the property upon showed up in the scheduled bidding last week, but it did not submit an offer.

Bengzon said two more firms said they would likely submit a bid in December, but he refused to disclose their identities.

The government set a minimum floor price of P1.86 billion for the lot in Urdaneta property.

The 4.8-hectare former IS property along Kalayaan Avenue in Makati City was expected to attract several prospective buyers because of its strategic location. However, the PMO and prospective bidders could have been turned off by the floor price.

Last week's auction was already the fourth failed bidding for the property.

If the government would get no attractive bid in December, Bengzon said the PMO could complete the property's privatization before the end of the year.

The property was originally owned by the International School but was turned over to the government in 1975.

In August 2000, the government decided to place the former IS property in the list of assets to be privatized. It has since transferred to Fort Bonifacio Global City.

URC to offer fitness drink

By Elizabeth L. Sánchez

CORONADO, Universal Robina Corp. is introducing a new fitness drink called "Vitalk." Unveiling the success of its green tea brand "C2."

URC president Lance Gokongwei said "Vitalk," contained in a blue bottle, was slated in the market recently.

Gokongwei, however, declined to reveal more details about the new drink which would soon be formally launched.

To power its expansion into the beverage business, URC will raise $72 million or roughly P3.9 billion from the proposed sale of 203 million shares to international and local investors in January 2006.

URC closed at P17.75 a share last Friday. The sale of 165 million shares at current market prices would raise P6.48 billion.

Proceeds of the sale would be used largely to [illegible] the production of C2.

Gokongwei said the company was planning to build one beverage plant overseas and six local production lines here. It will cost between $2.8 million and $4.2 million to build one beverage production plant, Gokongwei estimated.

Re-related to rental

When is May URC will hold its C2 plant.

Gokongwei said the JG Summit Group was also considering selling some of its shares in URC and other subsidiaries to increase the free float of shares in the market.

"We will take the opportunity provided by this offering to raise additional funds for URC's continuing expansion. "We also believe we can achieve through this offering a market capitalization that will be attractive for many global institutional investors," Gokongwei said.

He said URC would expand its export selling and bottling capacity in Nigeria to support the operation of its beverage business.

Firm to spend ₱20B on 3G

By Clarissa S. Santos

SUN WIRELESS INC., a standard radio operator affiliated with Globenet Inc., is allotting ₱20 billion for the five-year roll-out and operation of its planned third-generation or 3G wireless network.

Documents submitted to the National Telecommunications Commission showed that the company was bullied by Goldwyn Holdings Inc. would borrow ₱6.27 billion in the first three years of operation.

At the same time, it plans to secure about ₱1 billion in supplier credit over five years.

About ₱7.3 billion of expected revenue from operations starting the third year would be plowed back into operations, according to Securities.

The NTC said a would install five 3- antenna systems at 30 network core.

The 3G wireless network allows faster transmission of data, making it possible to send videos and large packets of data using the mobile phone.

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Carcar's pride of place shines through Kabkaban feast

PRIDE OF PLACE

Augusto F. Villalon

Cebu's premier heritage town pulsated with tradition during Sunday's Kabkaban Festival in Carcar.

The history of Kabkaban parallels the rise of heritage movement in Carcar.

The local affiliate of the Heritage Conservation Society, the Carcar Heritage Conservation Society (CHCS), has been working for years to revive interest in the special heritage of the town.

They believed a special event could refocus attention on the town's vanishing heritage, so they solicited funds and organized the first Kabkaban festival in 2000.

Succeeding festivals were modest, parallel with CHCS' slow progress in raising local heritage awareness. It took a long time for locals to believe their town's heritage was unique not only in Cebu but in the Philippines as well. The residents and local government had other developmental ideas for the town. Preservation was last on their agenda.

Since 2000, CHCS and the local government struggled with conflicting heritage visions. The conflict ended this year when Cebu Gov. Gwen Garcia guided both sides toward unifying their vision to recognize and preserve their heritage.

The first step taken was to declare Carcar a heritage town.

The provincial and local governments, together with CHCS, sealed their support and commitment to preserve the town heritage by passing an ordinance, the first such in Cebu. It was signed just a few weeks before this year's Kabkaban.

With the passing of the ordinance, private public agreement, essential to the success of heritage projects, was finally attained.

The provincial and local governments provided generous subsidies to underwrite this year's festival and asked CHCS members to plan and organize the 2002 festival.

Kabkaban Festival this year signaled the start of cooperation of all sectors to preserve heritage in Carcar. There was much to celebrate.

The day kicked off with a mix of artworks by Carcarenos and Cebuano artists, who showed their proceeds to fund CHCS projects.

Rodolfo Galicano, a nationally acclaimed award-winning artist born

CARCAR/E C1

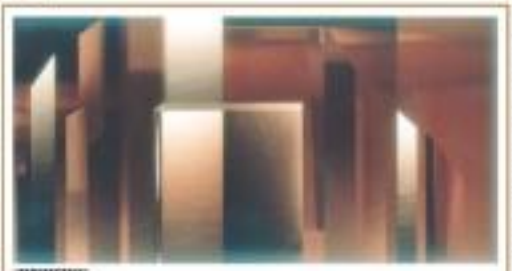
Marian procession on Dec. 3

THE 26TH GRAND MARIAN Procession of the Cofradía de la Inmaculada Concepción Foundation will be presided by Mozzo at 5:30 p.m. on Dec. 3 at the Shrine of Jesus the Divine Teacher in Pamplona ng Langsod ng Mayorila in Cotabamora.

On Dec. 5, 10 a.m., the Pist Commemorate Mass will take place at the Basilica (Cruz Lorenzo Ruiz in Binondo, Manila.

Manila Archbishop Gaudencio Rosales will preside over the concelebrated Hesitation Mayora Mass on Dec. 4, 2 p.m., at the Manila Cathedral in Intramuros, before the Grand Marian Procession scheduled to begin at 4 p.m.

This is an annual event led by Cofradía founding chair Imelda Cajayagin in cooperation with the Intramuros Administration headed by Undersecretary Ferrer Jr. and the Armed Forces of the Philippines.



"PERSPECTIVE"

Jaime Zobel pays tribute to modernist pioneer Fernando Zobel

IN HIS LATEST EXHIBIT, HOME, Zobel pays tribute to his uncle and mentor, artist Fernando Zobel.

The show will feature over 20 photographic artworks.

Jaime Zobel acknowledges the senior Zobel as his strongest influence. He was in attendance when Fernando taught a course in art appreciation at the Ateneo in the 1950s.

"Fernando Zobel has been and is my mentor and inspiration of the style that I have said my own. Color, composition, and form are part of this inspiration," he declares.

The two artists share an understanding of the soft luminosity of light.

Light is often ignored. Still, there are those who see past the exterior gloss of the world and into the inner workings of nature.

As a budding art photographer, Zobel has produced an impressive body of work. His explorations of light – its buoyancy and lesser dark tone – is both accessible and intriguing.

In notes accompanying the 2003 exhibit "Ode to Light," he says: "[I see] light not as an accomplice, but as a photographic theme. I do wish light what the Impressionists did – I paint with it. It becomes the familiar with an expressive quality – often, yet quite reflexive – that results in the

"METALLIC Reflection"

clicks on my side, giving me a continuous sense of the small space I take up in this strange and vast universe."

Better known in business as the chairman of Ayala, one of the oldest and largest business houses in the Philippines, Zobel has also been an art photographer for the past 30 years.

He is the first Filipino amateur photographer to be conferred a Li'ensiateur by the Royal Photographic Society. He has received numerous decorate from the French and Spanish governments for his contributions to art and culture.

For "Existence with Light," Zobel gallows works from different stages of his artistic life, with a few prints that will be available for public viewing for the first time.

The exhibit opens on Dec. 1 in the 2/F gallery of Ayala Museum in Makati City.

The opening will coincide with the launch of the book "Journeys with Light: The Vision of Jaime Zobel." A collaboration of Zobel and writer Jean "Bambi" Balfaqa, the book documents Zobel's works and exhibitions and chronicles his 20-year career as visual artist and photographer.

The book will be available at Filipinas Heritage Library and Ayala Museum.

Carcar's pride of place s

BEST seats for viewing the parade were definitely along the wide windows of the many bahay na bato which still stand along the narrow streets of the town.

CHOREOGRAPHED by award-winning Pol Sandigan of the Carcar Heritage Conservation Society, young Carcarenos dance in the streets in praise of the Carcar parade, covered all over Cebu for its uniqueness.

THE BALAY ni Tita, lovingly restored by its owners, is one of the resplendent Carcar houses that open its doors to the public for the Kahilwan Festival.

NOW SHOWING

ALL AGES ADMITTED

"THE BEST ONE YET!"

"DANGLAY," by Wilfredo Offemaria

Yuletide art at Gallery Nine

THE 11 ART WORKS that grace the Christmas cards of the Young Artists' Fund Project (YAFP) will be exhibited at Gallery Nine G/4 Bldg. A, SM Megamall starting tomorrow.

YAFP encourages private institutions to support the arts, particularly new talents. To raise funds, a luxury Christmas cards highlighting the artworks of 11 selected artists.

Each piece, upon acquisition by a corporate sponsor, comes with 200 pieces of the Christmas card bearing the image of the work. The cards are also available by bulk order.

The 11 artists this year are Fidima Antonio, Avie Bagtas, Yvonne Belen, Michael Cacnio, Salvador Ching, Shirley del Rosario, Romeo Forbes, Alfred Galura, Wilfredo Offemaria, Ric Sarmiento, Jef Sumoroy, and Rea Tanseng'co.

Gil MOTTO.

"WHITE Clemenao," by Alfred Galura

"GABAY" by Michael Cacnio

Esquillo at West
Antipolo artist

VISUAL ARTS

shines through Kabkaban feast

Carcaranons know how to throw a heritage party

THE PRE-WAR Carcar Dispensary covered with carved firetrucks is one of the premier wooden structures in the country.

billiop-lunch in the town below.

Carcar youth dancers tirelessly thronged the streets as the rhythm of drums and loud brass bands, followed by decrepit members who walked behind colorful floats, waving and calling out to their friends who either lined the sidewalks or marched from windows.

It was a festival for the cosmopolite. It was a fiesta event without the tourist polish the major festivals embellish for outsiders' benefit. Everyone was simply having a grand time that day.

The festival organizers vowed to keep the spirit of the festival after an all-night sagayaling Carcar culture, rather than degenerating into a dance competition like today's commercialized Sinulog Festival of Cebu City.

And the festival was superb. All of the participants danced to the streets with such gusto, joined by spectators wherever they could. It was in no way a well-rehearsed/polished performance seen in most of the institutionalized fiestas in the country.

Balikabkab rains through with authentic Carcar flavor, maintaining local identity as well as could see the Carcaranons grow with pride.

It was so much fun that I am definitely going back next year.

Heritage watch

Take a look at the street lamps that have recently sprouted on the Plaza side of Rizal Boulevard.

Feedback is welcome at arphalcon@hotmail.com

, Bandalan at Y, s at Pasig Museum

"SCRAPBOOKING Haven," by Alfred Esquillo

"COLORS of Memory," by Antonio Bandalan

Building, 1600 Metropolitan Avenue, Makati City. The exhibit features works on paper and canvas. Call 897-9000 ext 7121.

THE SPHERE sculptors Artists Guild (Group) will hold "Reflections" to oppose the destruction of Binondoc Forest Park by the Macapagal-Arroyo administration. The group shows will open on Dec. 3 at the Pasig City Museum. Participating artists are Mike Avecilla, Joseph Cleofe, Cesar Legaspi, Eddie Arbolo, Rustic Mirenian, Amelia Francisco, Joe Manansala, Genie Carlos, Vic Reyes, Joel Coronacion, Andy Ong, Andy Perez, Hendro Perayna, Bonnie Singer, Tony Avanzado, Dodie Maya, Pinot Cuevas, Pedro Arde, Sona Lee, Susan Ilarde, Dennis Hipolito, Oscar Dilacruz, Dennis Carreo and Mimot Galicinao. Call 638-1181 or 412-9514. Visit www.pasolo.com.ph

An artist too late

By Constantino C. Tejero

THE ARTIST CALLED SYD Ismiah of Solomon Pictura Modesta would seem to be an artist too late. He paints images that, despite the mastery of line and color and resources how lovely they look, are unconsciously look dated today.

Mistaken as an homage by Cubism painter Martinus Zimflam, known as the Annotosis of the South, Syd was churning out Intermittent pastiche when the master's work was being dismissed, if not entirely reviled, by the modernists.

He studied Fine Arts at the University of the East and University of Santo Tomas, and, with E. Aguilar Cruz, co-founded the Painting Group of Artists in 1966. Hearing regularly in his apartment on Bonanding Street in Sampaloc, Manila, it included Boaro de la Nosa, Romulo Galicano, Andres Cristobal Cruz.

They were drawing largely from French Impressionism, when that art movement had had its heyday almost a century earlier. They were proclaiming impressionistic still lifes, landscapes and genre pieces when the nonrepresentationalists were in vogue. Thus, lately or unlikely, most of their efforts were consigned to Mahirap Lt.

Now based in Canada, Syd has of late shifted his artistic style to that of Bonnard, Pissaro, Juan Gris. He considers the avant-garde progressive radical, never mind that Cubism is more than half a century old.

Witness his homecoming exhibit "A New Vision," 18 pieces in oil on canvas and pastel and charcoal on paper, presented by Graphic Gallery until Dec. 4 in the Art Center in the Atlantik, 4/L, Brig. A. Del Mogambell, Mandaluyong City.

There are mostly nudes and still lifes rendered in a broken interplay of cool and warm color tones, the model figures broken up by overlapping and overlaying planes and grids so that in some pieces they appear abstracted.

The artist also is double-major photography. The imagery looks busy, evoking the finely textured of Wesley Anton and Murray Saldivar. The latter says his inspiration is the intricate multimedia art-mural motif of Marsino-art.

The still lifes are especially lovely in pieces such as "Inner parent space," "Harmony in Green (with Chestnut)," "Table Composition with Drapery." On multiple exposure technique is particularly apt in suggesting a plenitude of fruits, flowers, pot, bottles.

We just can't understand why, in his effort to distance his work from the Cubists' dum had to invent the 6 inch anthropoic ideals as "investment" and "revolutionist nature" (is there such a thing—and if there is, what does it mean?).

One difference of his work from Cubism, he says, is his figures' sense of movement. But we've seen that before in Duchamp's "Nude Descending a Staircase," haven't we?

Cubist and Futurist fragmentation—the dissection of image and space and the repetition of line and form—is employed precisely to simulate such sense of movement, as well as to approximate the appearance of seeing the fig. ure in the round, from every angle, as it were.

Syn may deny that his still life, for example, is compositionally akin to Gris' or Braque's, although are can see that it is. Pillar his found of subject is actually closer to a "Rhapsodic Cubism, which Mondrian invented several decades ago.

What's more confounding, he describes his newfound modernist approach as "abstract art," apparently confusing culture with abstraction. He comes upon mod. ernist art as if it were still a revolutionary idea, a fresh discovery.

This is not questioning the merit of these works. We're only pointing out that they serve on the outer rather late in the day. Although, of course, good art is always timeless.

"HARMONY in Green (with Chestnut)." For left: Solomon Pisaniaca with his latest modernist work

"TABLE Composition with Drapery"

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